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THE POWER SUPREME



Francis C. Nicholas



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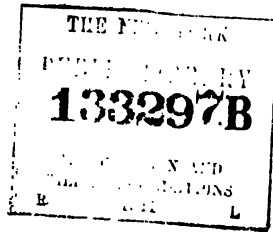
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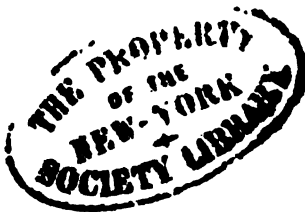




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PREFACE

IN the remote portions of South America, among those who live far from the changing interests and excitements of modern affairs, story telling is a favourite relaxation. Many a long evening about the camp-fire is shortened by tales of intrigue and danger told by hardy adventurers.

When the little party aiding me in my explorations were gathered together, surrounded by black night and trackless forests, we were insensibly drawn together, became interested in each other, and told the stories of the things which we had seen, and of the things which we had done. Often the tales were trivial, but frequently there would be found among us adventurers, who for political or civil offences found it convenient to seek asylum at unfrequented places in the jungles.

The stories — faithful accounts — illustrated the disorganized political and social conditions in Spanish America, — conditions which happily are gradually improving under the guiding influence of the United States. Presently better order will reign among our southern neighbours, and the evils of other days will be forgotten; a sufficient reason why some of the wild tales

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of reckless adventure, cruelty, and wickedness should be preserved.

They are instructive, too, in that they demonstrate the value of a well-regulated social order and the security of a state founded on upright homes and honoured maternity. When the better social conditions are lacking, history shows there is no security for state or individual.

Of all the men who told me of their adventures, not one stands out with such prominence in my memory as a half-breed guide named Joaquín, a man of giant strength, manly vigour, and keen intelligence, who had followed wild callings and engaged in revolutions bordering on the Caribbean Sea from Central America, down through the coast of Colombia, and in Venezuela, but the exact locations in his story are purposely disguised.

He was in middle life when he served me some time ago, and the account of him here given deals with the period shortly after our own Civil War. In attempting to tell his story as nearly as possible in his own words, I have sought to imitate the poetic recitative, which in the euphonious language of the Spanish Indian is so naturally fitting and harmonious.

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THE POWER SUPREME

CHAPTER I

INDIAN BOYHOOD

WHEN I was young the days were long and very happy, for we had enough, my mother and I, and our little house was always full. In our village the trade in rubber was our sustenance, and I was to be a rubber hunter when I became a man, and was always talking how I would go to the woods to collect rubber for Don Ignacio my father. All the men hunted rubber, and many of them sold it to Don Ignacio, but not all, for other Spaniards came to our village to trade, and each one had his house and family. Between us there was rivalry, the traders contending for influence and their women striving to serve them.

Every man of our village was in debt to the traders, and for this reason could not change from one trader to the other, for one can be imprisoned because of debt; and as the traders always brought new goods so that the men would want and buy beyond the value of the rubber they could find, it finally happened that each man looked on his trader as a slave might look on his master, and in truth all were slaves and each one feared his *patrón*.

To look back and think of happy days is a delight we all can have, for none can be so poor or so bad but they have some happiness for a memory. What I knew and loved as a boy has been all my life to me. I think of those days even when the storms blow dark among the woodlands; the rest I regret and, when I can, forget.

Our house stood on a rising ground in front of a great river, and always the sound of moving waters was in the air, sometimes a threatening sound of rising floods, sometimes a gentle murmur. At the foot of a muddy path canoes, some large, some small, were always swinging with the current. The house was but a single room, with space sufficient to hold our supplies and near it was the storehouse for the stock of rubber. The walls were made by driving poles deep in the ground; to these split bamboos were tied, making an open barrier not fully protecting us from the storms but pleasant because of the air on sunny days. The roof was made from long palm leaves, which, hanging low over the eaves, gave protection from the driving rains. Near our house were other houses, and beyond the village rude gardens where fruits in abundance for all our wants were grown. Then came the dark line of jungled woodlands where there was danger and where people seldom went alone.

Such were my surroundings as a boy. Of them all the canoe landing was the most to my liking; there with my companions I played for days succeeding days. We rocked to and fro in the canoes as they strained uneasily with the river's current, sometimes we swam and splashed about in the cool water and again sat Indian fashion in the shade of an overhanging tree

watching the water, the clouds, the wild birds; but doing nothing, and thinking nothing. These were quiet days, but when at intervals the Spanish traders came up the river tranquillity fled from our village and gave place to wild dissipation.

At these times I saw my father for a few days and for my mother's sake shared in the delight of his coming, but of me he took little notice. I thought nothing of this, for Indian children receive little attention, but I loved the excitement, and was proud that my father owned so many people in our village. Sometimes he brought me toys from the far-away countries, and always he talked to me of how I should one day go to the woods and hunt rubber for him. Soon he would go away again and for a time my mother would be sad and sit alone looking down the river whence his boat had gone. The village would be dreary in the hot sun and people all remained still. The rubber hunters would go back to the woods after a time, and we who were boys would take up again the old games which at first had seemed too dull after the days of excitement.

The old games, what a delight they were! Our bodies were bared to the winds and the sunshine, and we were as free as the birds of the forest, playing all day long, and happy as children only can be happy. Our games were not different in kind from those of other children. We imitated our elders and found pleasure in light imaginings of those conditions of life which would be our future burdens. Sometimes we built little canoes to sail in the river, again we would go to the woods on imaginary excursions to hunt rubber, which we always found before going very far because

the woods were so deep and mysterious, and the light there was all strange, and there were sounds that one might not understand. Of course no one was afraid, but very soon we found the rubber, for then we could hurry back to the open where the sun was clear and hot and the houses not far away. Lizards we took delight in shooting with tiny bows and arrows, and were never in want of game, for the creatures were found everywhere.

Yet we were not playing at these games all the time; there was the river in which scarcely an hour passed that did not see us splashing in and out of its cool water; and the hammocks swinging in the shadowy interiors of the houses often held us, and with what delight did we rock to and fro and feel the breezes blowing cool over our naked bodies! Life was good in those days, life is still good to some who were boys with me, for the woods overflow with abundance for the Indians, and they want not. But I am not an Indian, neither am I a Spaniard, and the happy days could not last.

My father, let a curse be on him, came more frequently after a time to our village. His demands for rubber and still more rubber could not be satisfied. On my mother many burdens were laid. It was much work for her to serve the parties, incessantly going and coming from the woods, and she grew old or looked to be old. One day he brought another woman to our house, a beautiful Indian girl, brought to the house which had always been ours, and he bade my mother, my only mother, serve her. She could not, the girl was of a family who were not our friends, they were

inferiors; my mother was the daughter of a chief, one of the proud people who claim descent from those who in days gone past were powerful and great. My father, may the devil be his always companion, beat my mother and she cried while the Indian girl looked on in scorn.

The blood of an Indian can hate, and the blood of a Spaniard can burn; the rage that I felt has not died away, it burns in me now. Knife in hand I made at his throat, but what avail? My father's arms were as steel, he held me before him, pinching my flesh and shaking me from side to side till I cried for mercy. Throwing me out through the door to the ground where I lay trembling and panting, he cursed my poor mother, and, from the house that had always been hers he thrust her with violence, and cursing bade her never return. She stood appealing for a moment, but he cursed her still more, called her vile names, told her she was ugly and old, and said that he knew her no more. "Return to your mother. Begone."

At these words she turned away nor looked back, but wild-eyed went through the village, I following, wondering and crying. Some saw and pitied, others laughed her to scorn, but she went without heeding, seeking a poor looking house where no welcome awaited. The old woman living there knew what was meant by her coming, she gave her a seat and some water to drink, that was all.

For me the days which were happy had passed. Now there was work, and hard work at that, for a garden had to be prepared, and maintained that my mother might eat, and my grandmother had always some new

task to lay on me. She was strong, and could have her own will, and to her I was but as a slave.

Time passed. I saw my father come and go and take no thought of us at all. Once I got in his way and he kicked me aside. I was older then, with stout muscles which work had made firm on my body. I was quick and alert. Resentment had burned so deep in my heart that my movements could not be else than intense, yet when he kicked me I made no response, but hugged the strength of my arms, and went on my path believing that my day of revenge would come in the end. The sun came and went, the moons opened and faded, the rains succeeded the dry seasons, and I growing strong came to man's stature, and was good to look upon, at least so said the girls of our village. I was favoured among them, and felt I should make them presents as other men made, though in years I was not more than a boy.

CHAPTER II

UP THE RIVER

"JOSÉ, could I go rubber hunting?" I asked the head man of one of Don Ignacio's rubber expeditions.

"Why not?" he replied. "Don Ignacio always wants men, but the debt is bad. You never go free."

"Yes, but all live, so what matter?"

"True, all live. Come and we'll ask him."

I went to my father. He was only Don Ignacio to me now; but reasoning with myself I thought that the closer I might be to him the surer my revenge. To kill him would have been easy but not good, for punishment would surely follow, not on me alone but on all of us at the village. So I waited, biding my time, seeking now only to come close to him. With José I went to the house where so much happiness had been mine.

It was not fresh and clean as I had known it. Stains were on the bamboo walls, the mud floor was worn to pits and broken roughness; but his men had undoubtedly worked well, for in the storehouse was a goodly supply of rubber which he would soon take away with him. Don Ignacio was sleeping and could not see us then, but we waited. Others were waiting, too. Some time had passed since the *patrón's* last visit and there was much to be done.

José mingled freely with the men about the house, joining in the ribald talk and coarse jests. All wanted rum for themselves and supplies for their women, and they must secure them from Don Ignacio because all were his debtors. As usual the rubber they had brought was not quite sufficient to pay their last accounts. Would he dismiss them with a curse, telling them that nothing more could be had till they settled; or would he treat them with favour, and send them away to the woods well provided?

While we waited a little boy came out of the house. I had seen him often before, but now looked at him intently. He was proud as I had been proud.

"My father will come out to you soon," he said, waving his hand to the men as he ran down the beaten path to join his mates in the river.

"Baby fool," I muttered under my breath, "you have no father, but you don't know it."

Finally the bark cloth hanging in front of the door was pushed aside, and Don Ignacio in cotton undershirt, a pair of loose muslin trousers, and straw sandals, stood yawning and stretching his body in the door-way, bleary eyed from heavy sleep.

His coarse, handsome face bore signs of excesses, and his expression was hard. There was light in his eyes but no kindness, and his men expected none, but bowing in salutation stood patiently awaiting his pleasure.

For a moment he looked at us and then said, "More supplies, more women, more rum; always the same and never the rubber to pay."

The men all protested, they had brought all they

could find, the weight in the woods had been heavy enough, but if the rubber grew lighter were they to blame? It had been heavy in the woods, but Don Ignacio's scales had proven the difference. Another time they would bring more than sufficient, but now supplies must be had, and some rum just to cheer up their going. So they urged, clustering about him, and after a little he yielded though seeming reluctant, — yet I noticed a satisfied look in his eyes as each man recited his past debts and acknowledged new obligations.

When my turn came he hesitated an instant, then said, "So you will hunt rubber? Got a girl, eh, who wants calico now, and you want to drink rum like the rest? Well, I want rubber. It's all one to me."

I acknowledged myself in his debt and received the following goods: one piece of calico, red and white, for which I would pay seventy-five pounds of fine rubber; one machette, not very large, twenty pounds of fine rubber; one piece of coarse cotton sheeting with needles and thread to make my mosquito bar and clothes, seventy-five pounds of fine rubber; one quart of rum, fifty pounds of fine rubber; one knife, twenty pounds of fine rubber; a pipe and a hand of tobacco, ten pounds of fine rubber, — a total of two hundred and fifty pounds.

Receiving the goods, I thought myself rich, and could now set up a place of my own. The calico I gave to an Indian girl whom I liked, and together we went to my grandmother's house, where we would live, my woman and I, though if I tired of her I could send her away, as Don Ignacio had kicked my mother from his house.

But none of us thought of that; now our desire was to drink up the rum, which I shared equally with my grandmother, my mother, and my woman. Usually the men were not so free, and soon we were happy, and being happy we afterward fell asleep and slept till morning. Then the three women made me two shirt-coats, two pairs of trousers, and what we called a *tolda*, a mosquito net like a small tent, for use in the woods. This was all that I required, and then, with my knife and machette, I was ready to go.

For a day we waited, and then, with all the rum gone and Don Ignacio refusing more, we prepared to start at sunrise the next morning. I was to go with José, at which he grumbled somewhat, claiming he wanted experienced men so that his total amount of rubber might be greater, yet on my promising hard work and extra duty in camp he consented. My first experience in the rubber forests was to be with a good leader, for none did better work than he, and Don Ignacio always said José was the only Indian on whom he could rely.

There were to be five of us. José the leader or captain, a dark-skinned Indian with broad forehead, high cheek-bones, rather short in stature but large of chest and long of arm; Topé, José's son by a negro woman, stout and of gross appearance, the features of the negro predominating but without the negro's good nature and pleasing eyes; a man called Ishpin, muscular and well-built, but with stupid face and eyes dull with dissipation, an Indian not capable of being a captain, so he followed José; a young man called Santiago, tall and straight, with the flesh of youth not yet marred by excesses, — a keen eye and strong hand were his,

the face clear cut, in all a fine type of the Indian. Finally there was myself, not yet a man but strong beyond a boy's strength. My life had been hard and I worked from pride, Spanish pride, that my mother might have a house and not feel the disgrace of a woman cast aside. In those days I was good to look upon, so the women all said, with muscular limbs, supple body, broad forehead, and wavy hair that was not straight like an Indian's. Surely I was active and strong, and José had no reason for complaint that I was to be of his party.

Good cause have I to remember the morning we started, when all the village stood on the bluff waving *adiós* and good luck. Our equipment was soon in the canoe, for we hurried, and other parties were making ready and each sought to be first, thus gaining more renown in the eyes of the women. I was well used to a canoe, but was no match for experienced hands in making ready. One, two, three canoes were in the stream and then we were among them, with one more to follow. Now came a race for the bend in the river which for nearly half a mile flowed straight in its course above our village. All strained at their paddles, the women shouting and calling encouraging words. How we struggled! José had rarely been beaten, and for a time we gained on the others and presently had place among them. Then my arm grew tired and lost much of its force, and slowly we fell behind, while the other crews laughed in derision. José spoke not a word; he lashed the water to foam with the force of his paddling, but still we lost ground. The other canoe reached us, hung by us a little and then slowly passed

in advance. From behind we heard the far-away voices of *adiós* as the first canoe waved its farewell and passed out of sight at the bend in the river. A second, a third, and a fourth time the shout was repeated. When we came to the bend we waved back toward the village, but not much response was accorded, for most of the women were now going back to their houses.

With an angry light in his eye José lay back in the stern, cursing promises that I should work well to pay for the failure. I made no response, for long before I had learned that silence was best, words bringing only chastisement, and here was no one to protect me. We went on some time without speaking, José allowing us to paddle our canoe more leisurely; then idle talk began, all discussing affairs of our village, the charms of the different women, the dealings of our masters the traders, the visits of the priests who sometimes came to baptize the children, and collect tribute, which none dared refuse. Even Don Ignacio gave, for all feared their curses, the hell that they preached, and the devil which but for their ministrations would be always among us. In truth there was devilment enough in our village, but the priests took no notice, — to baptize and get tribute was their mission.

As the morning wore on the sun grew so hot that we were glad to stop and rest on the bank till the high noon had passed. Stretched out at full length, in the grateful shade in striking contrast to the intense sunlight and the shimmering heat over the water, with the rich air filling my lungs to their very depths with scarcely an effort of breathing, I listened to the breeze among the

trees and the murmuring sounds of the forest. I felt it was good to rest and to live, and that midday would have been one of the best in my life, but just then José kicked me none too gently, saying, "So, this is your way of working! The women are still laughing at you for being the last. You lose us the race and then take your rest. Ho, *compañeros*, look at Señor Joaquín and see me kick him till he gets us our breakfast." But the second kick was not needed. With an angry throb in my throat I sprang to my feet to attack, and then bowed to his will. José was a power. I had come as the youngest and that I must serve the camp I knew, yet why had he kicked me to make my heart sore while all around was so beautiful? Santiago, no longer the youngest, lay at ease and looked at me preparing to serve in the place he had filled until now.

To cook for the camp was not a serious matter, and I was soon at work determined to have done with it; not determined to excel, but only to have done with it. A fire of driftwood was soon made near the river, a great iron pot was placed in the centre, the fire piled up around it, and in this were soon boiling a goodly supply of plantain, roots of yucca, some yams, and dried meat which had been cut in thin strips and cured in the sun. These were all boiled together for a half-hour or so and our breakfast was ready. The young Indian who had watched me came to my aid and together we carried the great iron pot to the deep shade where the men were taking their ease. Gourd dishes formed like ladles were brought, and, squatting around the iron pot, we ate and stayed not our hands till all was consumed. Then José gave me a handful of coffee

burnt black, which I crushed between stones and set to boil in the embers, using a tin pail, part of José's equipment. In a few moments there was a pail full of black liquor, a coffee such as we drink, and we enjoyed it the more because some brown sugar had been added while it was boiling. While I cleaned up the things, the men rested, and when my task was done I went to have my rest with them.

It was not for long, however, for José, after earnest consultation with Ishpin, now gave a quick word of command, and bade us man the canoe. We would try to pass above the other parties while they were resting.

José did not seek to pass the others for the glory of arriving first at the rubber groves; his object was to reach a secret path and make his way to a chosen rubber glade unobserved. He was always successful in finding rubber, and for years had maintained his secret location, but now it was known he would be watched, and if possible followed.

In the hot sun we forced our canoe on. The water was glassy, the light in our eyes made doubly intense by refractions, as we worked in silence, making slow, cautious progress and for an hour or so we bent to our paddling. Then a whispered command from José and we rested a little. At a bend in the river were four canoes and the smouldering remains of a camp-fire on a sand-bar beside them, but no signs of life. Cautiously now we paddled, with scarcely a sound till we reached the canoes, then stealthily hugging the opposite bank and scarcely daring to breathe we made past them. Still no signs of life. José, raising himself, gazed

searchingly at the empty canoes, grasped his paddle and whispered an order. We bent to our work and forced our canoe throbbing beneath our efforts on a race, this time for more than the applause of the women. José had misjudged his opponents, they had not been asleep but well hidden in the woods were watching our progress. Yet they did not follow. José noticed this and paused in his efforts, looked back, and bade us cease paddling. Why did they not follow? Did they think he was deceived by their ruse, and did not know they were watching? Yet there the canoes remained provokingly inactive. Evidently they hoped we should go on ahead, knowing they could overtake us. José would outwit them. A quick command and we were off again, bending our backs in an effort in which our leader joined. This time we made all the noise we could, cheering and shouting, while we dared the others to follow. Still no response. To every appearance our rivals were sleeping, but José knew better.

For a time we held our course, then, checking it, at a word of command, to my wonder began retracing our way in silence, dropping softly down-stream toward the canoes of our rivals, though now they were hidden from view by a long bend in the river. For a short time we held our way, then José turned the bow inshore where an alligator had been accustomed to bask in the sun. We stopped, made our canoe fast, then cautiously drew it up on the bank, keeping it in the path made by the reptile. Our work was so carefully done that not a trace of unusual disturbance remained, except the path where the alligator slid down to the water. The canoe

was concealed in the bush, and following José, our paddles in hand, we struck into the forest. Coming presently out again to the river, we went into the water, and paddles in hand made the sound of rowing while we shouted our challenge for the others to follow. Wading along in the water we kept up our efforts for some distance, then, going ashore, we hid in the woods near the bank to watch the results.

Presently we heard the sounds of canoes, the steady beating of paddles, and voices in eager discussion and evident pleasure. Yes, we were followed, and now hidden safe in the forest would soon see our pursuers; with eager eyes we watched for their coming, nor had we long to wait. Straining every nerve they came around the bend, one, two, three, but where was the fourth? José had for once been outwitted, we were now between two parties. Evidently the four canoe companies had made common cause together to ascertain where José found his rubber.

With an angry look at me, José ordered that Santiago and I return, and bring up the canoe as quietly as might be, — an errand not much to our liking, for the current was swift and the canoe heavy, yet who dared question what José commanded? Hurrying, we went through the woods seeking the canoe, nor were we long in reaching it, for we dreaded José's displeasure. The launching was difficult work; to return to the water what five men had drawn out was a hard task for two, but Santiago, urging, showed me a scar on his back, a token of how José could punish if it suited his fancy. With our young strength forced to its utmost we laboured, succeeded, and when the canoe was afloat

dared not stop to rest, but, though tired and strained, still urged on our way.

We worked with a will, I bitterly reproaching the day which had brought me on such a business as this. Sometimes when the current set harder against us and turned the canoe from its course, a sort of frenzy seized my mind and curses flew thick from my lips. When we at last came to the place where the men were waiting, we found José in a mood for any ill doing. Not a word was spoken. Indians are not demonstrative, their hate is too deep. It is only the Spanish passion that flies out at the lips in uncontrolled curses. What curse of words could do any harm to one's foes or opponents?

José gave the signal, and we started forward. Evidently we were in difficulties. Heretofore he had always been first on the river, reached his landing long before the others, and had hidden his canoe deep in the bush and been on his way to his rubber groves before his rivals had reached the point where he had left the river. Now he was watched; rivals were above and below him. We could hear voices behind us, and at the sound the deep flashing eyes of José rested on me in an expression boding ill for my first trip to the forests.

I was bitterly tired, yet under that eye worked on and still on, not daring to stop, but the effort was vain, for our rivals in the fourth canoe came on, manned by stronger arms carrying them steadily forward. They saw us, no cheer broke from their lips, only silently onward they came; no word from José, only an angry light in his eyes, a tight drawn mouth, and muscles showing like bands on his chest.

For years José had maintained supremacy among

the Indians because by good fortune he had at one time found a grove of rubber-trees which he had retained for himself in secret, bringing out such abundant supplies that he had become the king rubber hunter in all that country. Could he ever get out of debt, he might himself become an owner of men, — a state which to the other Indian captains would have been hateful.

Now that José was caught he must either return with such supplies as chance might bring, and, because of the small amount of rubber gathered, run the risk of Don Ignacio's displeasure and the loss of prestige in the village, or else he must risk going to his chosen spot in the woods while his rivals were watching. I was the cause of it all, and, though he worked for my father, that did not help me, I must suffer. If the truth were known, José had nothing to fear from him, and if I should have happened to die in the woods, Don Ignacio would not have been displeased.

As the other canoe came abreast of us, grunts of recognition were given from one to the other, and José turned to a part of the river where a camp would be convenient. For that day our work was done.

CHAPTER III

"FRUIT OF THE EARTH"

ON reaching the bank I fell almost exhausted, stretching out to take what surely was a rest well earned. José did not kick me this time, a look was sufficient. How I hated him then, and I began to plan his undoing as I set to work preparing the dinner.

What I cooked was the same as we had eaten for breakfast except that now two of our men, José and Ishpin, went hunting and would bring us fresh meat.

While I was engaged with the cooking the others were making the camp. Long poles were brought from the forest, and from these a skeleton shed was made, one side resting on the ground. The other opened to the river and was supported by stouter poles, the whole held together by fibrous bark, cut from the trumpet-tree. When the frame of the shed had been made like a lattice-work with broad spaces between the poles, great bundles of large leaves were brought, were notched on the heavy mid-ribs with a knife, and then placed on the poles, the notches holding the leaves in position, one tier overlapping the other till the roof was completed and we were secure for the night.

José returned with a great wild turkey, and giving a grunt of satisfaction stretched himself under our

shelter, where, after he had selected the place he would keep for himself, the other men too lay down at their ease. On the bank of the river I worked cleaning the turkey. The feathers stuck to my fingers as I plucked them, the blood clotted and stuck to my hands, mosquitoes began to torment me, and resentment burned in my heart.

That night I could have poisoned them all, yet what good would it do me? I must work now to be powerful later on. Just then my heart gave a throb, and seemed to rise up in my throat and sink down again. Why should I not please José and poison our rivals? He would do that himself if he could, but he knew they were too careful and would have taken nothing from us; even rum would have been refused. My desire seemed impossible to accomplish, and yet I kept thinking and planning. In the woods were plenty of poisons, some to kill, some to sicken and then perhaps kill, yet our rivals were watchful. I worked with better will, for an interest had sprung up within me, and presently I sat by the fire resting and still planning while the dinner was cooking.

I began watching the other party. Our rivals had finished their camp, and the youngest, a sturdy Indian, was cooking the dinner; their leader, tall and ungainly, the great bones of his frame attesting his strength, was taking his ease. If I could fix him, — but his piercing eyes met mine, and my glance trembling turned aside, unable to face his searching looks. I saw him motion to one of his men and say something with a gesture toward me, and from that moment I was watched; some one or other of our rivals had his eyes constantly

on me. It is not easy to harm cautious men where violence can be met with equal violence, and watchful caution waits to outwit cunning. But some harm must be brought to them, so I sat by my fire cooking the dinner and planning; and their leader sitting by his fire — was he planning? Perhaps.

That night we ate plenty, and while the twilight was gathering I went for a swim, the cool water tempering the heat in my body. If only I could secure poison and bring it unobserved to the camp, but this was not to be done. Naked I walked on the sand-bar, the soft breeze drying my skin. To and fro, back and forth I went as if restless to take the air, till I saw growing near the edge of the jungle a plant which I knew would do the work I wanted to accomplish. If only I could secure it and place some of the juice in the food our rivals would eat in the morning! Did my glance tell or speak to my rivals? Not by my intention, but they saw what I looked at, for Raw Bones said, “ ‘ Fruit of the earth ’ growing yonder, it might do some harm. Gather it up and throw it into the river.” His men were quick to obey and soon the “ fruit of the earth,” a fungus growth like toadstools, was plucked from the ground, and thrown into the water. Surely my plans were defeated, and turning back to the fire I adjusted my breech-cloth and hung my *tolda* at the place which was left for me after the others had occupied the best of our shelter.

Night came, the tropical night, damp air laden deep with the odours of earth and the heavy perfume of the flowers, and through the brooding dark came the notes of birds of the night and the cries of wild animals.

Presently I knew that all were asleep. I knew that the night was dark and that deep shadows hung on the edge of the jungle, no one could see me, yet to wander away in the dark was fraught with great danger, for jaguars were ever haunting the camps, and more than one Indian had fallen a prey to their maraudings. I could not face the morning, the work would be too hard; if only a little bit of poisonous "fruit of the earth" could be had. I listened intently, no ominous sounds disturbed the calm of the night. Why should I fear danger? I raised the edge of my *tolda*, the damp cool came over my face.

Cautiously I crept from under my cover and stood alone in the night, the river lapping the sands at my feet, the misty air gathering about me, the forest black and mysterious just at my side. Why should I fear the dangers of night more than the toils of the morrow? Yet that awful mysterious feeling of night I shrank from with dread. Forcing my courage, I walked to the edge of the forest. My act availed not at all, for the woods were so dark that scarce an outline could be distinguished. I had only one hope, perhaps some bits of the fungus still remained, and perhaps I could find the place where it had grown. Cautiously I walked back and forth measuring my distance from the river where I had bathed, and thence to the jungle, till I became convinced that I had located the spot where the "fruit of the earth" had been growing. Carefully feeling about in the ground, I sought, eagerly hoping to find a bit, but nothing was there; then I thought of the roots, perhaps burrowing with my fingers in the ground I might find some. Surely enough, in a mo-

ment my fingers encountered a spongy fragment which seemed like a stub of a "fruit of the earth." I eagerly sought to secure it and had a bit in my hand.

Great Saints! what was that! the sound of a footfall out in the forest, the soft pressure of something approaching heard in the leaves. Cold chills passed shuddering over my body as I pictured the fierce burning eye, gleaming teeth, and sharp cutting claws of a jaguar. Like a shadow I fled through the night and trembling gained my *tolda* and was safe. Lying back, my heart beating loud, I waited, but nothing occurred. The night was all peaceful, a dim light flickering up from our fire gave me confidence. I was safe. Then, noticing something clutched in my hand, I found a bit of soft fungus, — surely a part of the "fruit of the earth."

Again all was silent. Out into the night without further delay I went, seeking our rivals' camp, though I had such a little bit of the poison that it scarcely seemed worth while to use it. So easy to lose, such a little bit, how should I place it? Noticing the iron pot which they used in cooking, I rubbed the bit of poison all over the bottom, greasing it well, and I thought to myself while I did it, now perhaps I will redeem the harm I had done to our party.

In a moment more I was back in our *rancho*, and under my *tolda* lay down contented. Not to sleep, however; fear and excitement were on me, and presently, cowering before some unseen dread, some terror of darkness, I hid my head under my arms and waited. Great Saints! there was that footfall again, yes, stealthily coming nearer and nearer. Sitting up

I made the sign of the cross, repeating it over and over, and in the sand traced the cross that evil might not pass over it. Something was coming, now it was near the camp, then I heard it come out by the river and go down to the water, then came a little sound, just a tiny splashing. I could not resist looking out, and cautiously raised the end of my *tolda*. There, a black outline against the dark gleaming water, I saw the form of a man like a giant in stature. I would have shrieked out in terror but my voice failed entirely. When my eyes grew used to the sight I saw it was only our rival Raw Bones, seemingly increased in size by the shadowy reflections in the dark steely water. What was he doing alone and naked? Fear left me now; watching intently, I waited. Yes, something was held in his hand. Now and again he moistened it in the water, the drip making the soft splashing sound I had heard like an echo, so still was the night. Now he turned and went to our pile of supplies; sought the coffee-jug, and served it as I had served their iron pot. Then he went to his *rancho*.

What a delight came upon me! The Saints, how I thanked them! The sign of the cross, how well it had served me! Yes, the priests were right in what they taught. I would follow them now, the Church was a power, no charm like the sign of the cross to protect one from evil. Were it only safe to get up I would go and make the sign of the cross over their iron pot, that my poison might be effective. How foolish for me to neglect such a charm in a case of such moment.

I fell asleep and the first thing I knew the harsh voice of José was calling and commanding, "Do you think

to sleep all day? Get up, the sun will soon be rising and we want our coffee and plantain." Eagerly I crawled from under my *tolda*, sprang to my feet, and without fear, excitement aflame in my eyes, made a sign to José. He, careful leader that he was, ever alert and watchful, turned from me and walked behind our *rancho* just where I would go to gather wood for the fire, and there in brief words I told what was done in the night. Low was my voice, I feared that he did not hear me, but a quick answer came, "Lose the coffee-pot in the river, let the current take it away," and José was gone.

I went on with my work, going to the river to get water, and then Santiago who was there bathing shouted out, "That silly pate Joaquín has gone and lost our coffee-pot in the river." Angry voices replied from our camp. In the other camp our rivals were mocking. José strode down to the river and bade Santiago dive for the coffee-pot, but it was useless, the current had carried it beyond recovery. Then José grabbed me by the breech-cloth and dragged me to one side while I howled for mercy, and the men in the other camp mocked. "Well done," whispered José, and then cuffing and buffeting me, made a great sound with his hands but gave me little pain; but I would have borne more than that after hearing those two words of praise. With lusty pleadings I cried and beseeched till he gave me a kick and bade me roast the plantains that we might eat something before starting again on our journey.

This was quickly done and with glum faces we sat around, each munching a plantain. The other camp had better fare, but their leader did not look so pleased

as the others. Then the canoes were started on their way up the river. José gave the order for vigorous work, and in spite of our lack of coffee seemed in good humour. For a long time we worked, the river leading on higher and higher toward the hills at the foot of the mountains. At last the sun reached a point in the heavens from which the rays, falling straighter, gave warning that the hour before midday was passing, and it was time we all stopped for breakfast.

Our rival's canoe had hung close to us, urging when we urged, tarrying when we tarried, and now they stopped where we camped for the noon-time. Soon the fires were burning, the iron pots were in place. We did not take the trouble to wash ours, and our rivals were equally careless. We had fish and turtles caught on the way up to make our *sancocho*, as we called the great stew of everything put together in the big iron pot. Our rivals were well supplied also, and the camps were contented, though I was wildly excited and could tell that José was concerned, though he gave no sign nor looked at all at the camp of our rivals, and patterning my course after his was intent on my cooking. In a little while we were all of us eating, so were our neighbours. Indians eat as fast as they can and soon all was finished; then we heard a cry from one of our rivals, sudden vomiting seized him, the others were soon sick and their camp was all in an uproar. My poison had done its work, not a deadly work, for there were contras in plenty and soon their remedies brought them relief, but, oh, they were sick. Now it was our turn to mock them as they lay on the sand. José called on us and bade us man our canoe. Our

rivals were safe for a whole day at least, perhaps more. We must now come up with the others and lead them as far on as we could. Surely to reach unobserved a rubber ground known to be rich was no mean undertaking.

José bade us paddle with all the speed that we could, and constantly working himself, we made good progress. After an hour or more we heard the sounds of canoes, and then José lay back in his seat at the stern and we paddled as if nothing had happened.

Presently the three canoes appeared in the river before us. They stopped, and at a sign from José we stopped, then signalling again he bade us work leisurely forward. Shortly we were up with the canoes. José knew that a race would be useless, our opponents were all of them men, I scarcely more than a boy, and Santiago a youth not yet come to man's strength. José stood up in our canoe and looked them over, then in a harsh voice said, "Why are you men waiting, with three canoes keeping before me, and one always hanging behind. Can't you find your own rubber?"

"Not your rubber, José, your good company we seek. You should keep with us," their leader replied.

"And if I choose to keep by myself?"

"And become a *patrón* through finding much rubber? Look carefully, Joaquín, Santiago take care, José will be no easy master. He wants young men later, that's why he takes you boys now."

José's eyes flashed in answer.

"Yes," the leader continued, "you a *patrón*! Do you think we'll allow an Indian to rule as a *patrón* in our village?"

José took his paddle, and, giving quick orders, we were soon all forcing our canoes through the water, yet our opponents always hung just in advance. Presently we stopped again, and the others stopped with us. The position was difficult, Indians speak but few words except when they are drinking.

José whispered to Ishpin, "If we could get rid of one we could risk a fight with the others. Joaquín is quick with his knife, and Santiago has done his part well before now."

Then the word was whispered from one to the other in our canoe, "There may be a fight. José says get up the river as far as we can," so steadily forward we forced our canoe, José in the stern, working and planning.

We all knew what he was thinking, — he must lose his secret or conquer, by some means, our opponents. He knew he could rely on us, because to be one of his crew meant easy living, and Don Ignacio's favour. What more could an Indian ask or obtain? Yet, José was slow to fight, and had not killed a man for years; but when one has plenty there is not much reason for killing, and José had always enough.

It was a long way yet to the foot-hills where grew the trees which we sought. José might have reached his groves through the deep trackless jungles, but the labour would have been very great, and the difficulty of bringing out the rubber would have been heavy; certainly he must reach his ground by an easier route.

It was a hard day's work, but evening came at last and we camped as usual on a sand-bar by the side of the river. Our *rancho* was made as before, the material

being everywhere plenty, but this time we had rival camps on each side of us. I prepared to cook, and to my surprise and relief José said, "Santiago, help Joaquín get the dinner." Santiago made protest, but who ever failed to do José's will? From now on I knew I was to have easier work, perhaps José's favour. I said nothing, but in silence worked with Santiago, careful that he did his full share. That night we ate well, for game was abundant, and Santiago was more than skilful with cooking.

A surprise was waiting me when our *toldas* were spread. José directed that mine should be next to his own, at which our companions all wondered and whispered that José would show favours to pretty Joaquín; though none openly called me pretty, for that among men is an affront, and though I was young, none cared to insult me.

We went to sleep early, for the work had been hard. Evidently each party had the same opinion of the other, for none left their cooking utensils exposed, and with the provisions these were all taken under the *toldas*.

We soon fell asleep, each feeling safe in the *rancho*, for once an Indian is asleep he will surely remain quiet till morning. We might have gone on in the night and so made away from our rivals, but the river is dangerous and none ever travel up river by night in our country.


I had not been sleeping long, when, startled, I felt something moving beside me, yes, stealthily feeling around was a hand. I drew to one side as far as the *tolda* would let me, and then, ready to strike with my

knife, waited, scarcely daring to breathe. The hand touched me, and I heard José's voice saying in a whisper, "I knew you slept lightly. Come in here with me."

How a boy's feeling can change! But a short time ago José kicked me and I, hating him then, thought on revenge; now with eager thoughts and quick pulse I softly made my way to his *tolda* and lay down beside him. No word was spoken. Listening intently, we heard only the subdued night voices and the steady breathing of our companions; and yet I felt sure I heard something, not more than an impression, yet something unfriendly, not in harmony with all the sounds of the night.

Then José said, "To-morrow you follow me and keep your knife ready. We will make our camp by the river and then seek out new rubber groves. Ishpin will lead one party, but you follow me. Lay still now awhile, and then go back to your *tolda*. We can talk in the woods to-morrow where we will be alone; too many ears may be listening now."

"But all are asleep," I whispered, boy-like, impatient that there should be a delay in a matter of such great interest, but just then a sound came on the night. Something near us certainly moved and was still. Perhaps one of our companions disturbed in his sleep had turned slightly, perhaps it was nothing. After a few moments of silence I stealthily crept back to my *tolda*, and as I lay down to sleep fancied I heard a footstep on the sand, then another, a sound so gentle it might have been nothing; and then all was still except the harmonious sounds of night in the tropical woodlands.



With morning I was early awake, among the first in the camp to be out of my *tolda*. Coffee was made for our men in an old tin pail which served well enough, and then we were off taking our way up the river again, our opponents still hanging close to us. By this time the tension had somewhat worn off. José had laid all his plans, though to my disappointment he said nothing to me. I was well contented, however. Our opponents were more than pleased that they could keep along with us; and by the time the sun rays grew hot, we who had always known one another, and in spite of our quarrels had gotten along through them all, were feeling more fraternally disposed. That noon-time saw quite a hilarious party all camped together by the side of the river.

After breakfast the older men sat discussing the prospects, and cursing the traders who owned them, while some of the crew slept, and the younger men after resting a little splashed into the water, and, cooling their bodies, found rest and contentment. But in a very short time the leaders called us, and working again, we bending our backs, made good progress, for all hoped to reach the permanent camp before night, and have done for a time with canoeing. In this we were not disappointed, and that afternoon when the sun was yet high José turned our canoe to one side of the river where a low hill came sloping down to the water making pleasant ground, and said that there he would camp till he gathered his rubber. The others looked at the place somewhat surprised. All knew that once this country and the hills just behind it had been rich in rubber; now the trees had been killed. But José knew

his mind, and though the others protested that no rubber could be found there, he told them to go where they pleased; for his part, he would work on the old ground again.

"And look you," he said, "I have no secret place in the woods. I will find rubber though you may find none. Come try with me here. The results will prove what I say."

Our rivals had hesitated, now they accepted the challenge, and soon we were all on the shore preparing the camps. I, remembering what José had told me, was near him always, my knife hanging ready; yet for this there seemed scarcely any occasion, and of me José took no notice. Once I drew away, but a quick glance that he gave me was sufficient that I should keep to my orders strictly.

Our parties were now ranging about through the woods seeking material for building the camps, and soon the sounds of stout-bladed machettes rang out through the woods as some men were chopping down trees for posts, gathering poles, or collecting the great giant palms, while others were clearing the brush from a sloping ground close by the river.

Building a camp was not difficult work. First two posts were driven deep in the ground, with a crotch on the top of each where a ridge-pole would rest, then four smaller posts were driven in, two at either side of the principal posts, to form the four corners of our camp. These smaller posts were low, the form that we sought being tent-like. The cross poles were then tied in place with bark fibres, and on these other poles were laid and then tied, one end resting on the lower cross

poles, the other on the ridge-pole in the centre. Cross poles were then tied on at intervals, and in a short time the frame of our camp was finished. It was an easy matter to thatch this frame with great palm leaves, and our camp was completed. We were not quite contented, however, and though the steep sloping sides of the roof thatched with palm extended almost down to the ground, and the long ends hanging over the lower cross poles would have been protection enough, José directed that on either end other poles should be tied about half-way up the peaked opening. Through these poles palms were forced in and out to the roof, making protection at each end of our camp, and this made it very secure.

We knew that to-morrow would be given mostly to rest, and were pleased and elated. Our camp was the best of the three, in fact was so good that the others said José had built a fine house and must mean to stay a long time. But José answered nothing at all.

CHAPTER IV

JOSÉ'S SECRET

THAT night we slept at our ease and next day began our search for rubber, — just ranging about through the woods, not really working. Our rivals complained somewhat, saying the place was poor, that José should have led them to a better ground, and might it not be better to change even now? But José told them to go where they would, they were not in his keeping.

Our first work was little more than a walk through the woods looking for pleasant places where rubber-trees might be found. There were many young trees. These we hacked at relentlessly to take all the milk which could be had from them, but the yield was not much, and a few pounds of rubber would represent the total day's work. We must go deeper into the woods, and perhaps remain for some days before we could hope to find any large trees. José said he would take me with him to carry provisions, and that Ishpin could remain and work the ground near the camp, and then after our return he could go into the woods and we would work near the camp.

I was all excitement now, for surely when I was deep in the woods with José he would talk as he had promised when I had gone to his *tolda*, but for this I

must wait. We had all come back to camp, and while the long shadows of the declining sun lengthened about us we sat at our ease. How delicious it was; the air, how rich, how completely it filled us. There was warmth in the shade, and though not heated, the earth was pleasant and comfortable, not damp and chill to the touch; there was a sense of repose in the air, the blending of a thousand soft murmurs, the breezes just stirring, the water's soft ripples, the droning of insects, and the singing of birds. Around us the woodlands were green to intenseness, above us was the sky with its blue depths in the zenith with white clouds hanging low on the eastern horizon, and clear light shone in the west toward which the sun was gradually sinking. Rest and beautiful peace in the dreamy soft air of the tropics! Could one always live under such influence one could do no wrong.

Presently strife entered among us, for a canoe came up the river filled with angry Indians who claimed that some one had poisoned their food. Who would have done such a thing? Why should any one do it? Besides, it could not have been poison because not one had been killed; had poison been given some must have died; yet they were indeed a poor, sorry lot, and, not convinced, they swore that they would find out who had done them ill and would have revenge.

José was more silent than ever and even more watchful. He knew he had enemies, brought by his success, as Raw Bones' attempt at poisoning down the river had shown where if he had succeeded he could have had José in his power, and prevented his return in time to the village with the rubber, or made him give

up the secret of his rubber grove to his rivals in order to obtain their aid. Even now if he would not share with them they might kill him, that he should not come to such success as to have power, and perhaps become a *patrón* to rule those who went to him for money. Yet he apparently feared them not at all, though by his command I was always near him with my knife ever ready.

Santiago was not greatly pleased, for the cooking was made more and more his charge and burden while I followed José. That evening he contrived to have me sit near him where the sick Indians would probably hear what we said.

"Why should any one poison their friends?" I asked.

"For jealousy," he replied, "or perhaps one of the other crews seeing I was not strongly equipped poisoned them, and would have poisoned the other crews later on, and then following with us alone could perhaps have made terms. To divide with one crew would not have been so bad, but to share with four,— is too many. Let them poison each other; perhaps when some go away we can arrange with the others."

Thus we talked, and knowing the sick Indians heard us, we felt sure that suspicion had found place among them, and suspicions could grow to such evil feelings that we might expect those who had united, combining against us, would soon be antagonistic, one party seeking harm for the other.

Next day José and I prepared for the woods. We would not be gone long, so took little with us, and just before we set out José said to me so that one of the

other captains might hear him, "Four crews are too many. If three of those who want to be with us should be sent away we might make business with one, but four crews are too many." Then lifting an overhanging branch, we stepped into the woodlands. Around us was tempered light, grey trunks of great trees, a green canopy overhead, long golden sunbeams and tender-winged butterflies flitting past. All the contention of the little camp was shut out by intervening green walls of the forest. José spoke no words, but with vigorous step strode on over ferns, mosses, and tender plants of the shade. So for a good half-day we tramped and then sat in a grove of great trees to rest and eat. While we rested I saw in the distance a white trunk of a tree gleam as a sunbeam fell across it. In an instant I sprang to my feet. "Rubber," I said; "see it yonder."

José looked up for a moment, and then rising indifferently said we would look to see if it were worth cutting.

The trees proved to be only young material, but we decided that it would be as well to cut and kill them, for it were useless to leave the trees that they might grow larger to benefit others, so we took what could be had for ourselves, though the trees were really too young to yield us much rubber. First we cleaned up the leaves beneath the trees and at the foot of each made a smooth basin-like depression in which the sap would collect, then with our machettes we cut and gashed at the trunk, beating the bark with the backs of our knives, and doing everything possible to maltreat the trees and increase the flow of the milk.

After working an hour or more several quarts of milk had collected at the foot of the trees, and now

oozing more slowly began to coagulate on the trunks in long clotted strips, lengthening as the sap oozed out and trickled slowly down toward the ground. Our work was done, a few pounds of rubber would repay our labours, and a group of trees which with care should have been useful for years were now surely dying, though that was no concern of ours. Leaving the rubber to dry so that we might collect it on our return, we started walking again, following on in the same direction without turning to one side or the other. Once I saw rubber-trees in the woods near a brook, but José would not stop, only on and on we went, not speaking a word.

When evening came, we found ourselves by a stream, quite a volume of water, which I judged was a branch of our river, the junction with which we had passed some days before. If José's rubber was on this river why had he not directly ascended the branch, which we could have done unobserved? It was useless to question, I knew that José would not answer, and when he bade me make a raft of logs so that we might cross the branch river, I set to work at once. The task was not hard, trees yielding a soft, light wood were felled, the trunks were lashed together with climbing vines, and the raft was ready. Then long poles were cut and with these we guided the raft, making our way across the branch, where I hoped we would camp for the night; but no, the raft was drawn up on the bank, and José strode directly into the woods, our way leading down a little, till we came to a smaller branch of the river. Here José ordered another raft made, and when it was finished directed me to leave it on the bank

where it was. With hurried steps, and much to my surprise, we went back to our first raft, then we returned to the other, and came back again to the first. This had now worn quite a path and José seemed satisfied. We then built a small *rancho* of posts and palm leaves and prepared our camp for the night.

We had brought some plantain with us, José killed an iguana with his shotgun, and I, trying my luck with a hook and line, caught a big catfish, so our dinner promised to be sufficient. As the sun was setting, we roasted our plantain and toasted the fish and the iguana; salt we carried with us and presently had a bountiful dinner piled up on broad leaves. Surely life in the woodlands is good, with hearts beating with vigorous life, and with keen appetites sharpened by work; of food there is an abundance, and always the great forest around one. Evening was coming on and José and I were alone, I, a boy eager to make a way for myself, and José a man, veteran of many campaigns after rubber and of many wild scenes in the woods.

Surely now he would talk to me, though I knew he was considering carefully. I was not disappointed, for after he and I had eaten our fill, he said:

“Joaquín, may the dead come to follow your path for ever if you break faith with me.”

A shiver ran down my back, fearful things which I had heard of the dead following to haunt one came to my mind, so making the sign of the cross I promised silence and obedience for ever. In measured tones José told me that his secret rubber field was in a valley among the mountains above us, where it seemed that the earth had become turned wrong, for the valley

was at angles across other valleys. It was deep in the middle and extended for miles, rich in rubber. The only way to reach it was at either end, where the approaches were blocked by heavy collections of rock at which searchers had always turned aside, for such lands were not suited to rubber. None of the members of his crew had ever been taken to this rubber valley, except three, and long ago these three had broken faith and now they were dead.

For a moment José stopped in his story. Night had come, the woodlands were black, dark outlines of trees were standing mysterious in the light of our fire, and José, his keen eyes, sharp prominent nose, compressed lips, and protruding chin lighted up by the blaze, bent toward me, a menace burning in his piercing eyes, his great muscles ridged with tension. His features relaxed, and, continuing, he told me that on each trip he had made his camp at a different place on the main river but near his rubber valley. He would go alone, gather rubber, take it to some place in the woods, and have his men get it from there and take it to the camp by the river. Now he must be more careful, he was being watched too closely, he required help, and he had chosen me because I had shown keen judgment in poisoning our rivals. To-morrow we would be followed, the men who came searching would go to the little branch where our second raft lay, but the rubber was up the main branch of the river.

Then he told me that when he returned he would take my mother to his house to be a woman to him, and there I could bring my girl to serve me. We would all be one family. He said he would give me the direc-

tions for the day's work in the morning and now we would sleep, for we must be up and away long before the sun would rise. We sought our *toldas*, José to sleep, I to lie awake in excitement. Surely here was honour enough. José, the first Indian in our village, would take me to his family, my mother would be woman again to a man, and would no more be a reproach with her people. José had two other women, but what of that? When I was strong and grown up I meant to have six. José's rubber valley would give plenty for all.

While I lay awake building my dreams of happiness, a sudden cry in the woods chilled my blood. In an instant all was still. Then the chirpings and cries of birds and insects and all the soft sounds which fill the jungles at night went on again. I had often heard that cry, but never before so close to me. It was a jaguar, and holding my breath, I waited to hear him again. Sure enough there it was, a low growling, rising to a higher and higher pitch, and terminating in a sudden volume of sound, half-cough, half-roar. It ended abruptly, and all the night was still. The jaguar was coming to our camp, but I knew it would not attack us, we were safe. No jaguar had ever been known to attack a *tolda*, yet the dread of this terrible animal, the many stories I had heard of men caught at night and eaten, all came to me as I lay awake listening. I knew that somewhere a jaguar was prowling about, but I would not hear him again. They cry out but a few times, and after alarming their prey make their attack in silence.

The next thing I knew something was pushed under

my *tolda*, and touched me roughly. With a cry of alarm I jumped to one side, and then recognized José's voice, and saw that it was his hand by which I had been awakened. The grey light of dawn was just appearing and in an instant I was at his side. Hurriedly I went to prepare something to eat, but he stopped me saying he would do that himself. He directed me to go to the smaller branch of the river, take the raft we had made to the other side, leave it there, swim across the river and come back to him; and he charged me that when I came out of the branch to throw water on my footprints so that they might not look fresh.

Remembering the jaguar I had heard in the night, I was fearful, yet dared not disobey, so with knife in hand I hurried alone into the woods. How fearfully long that path seemed, what terrors lurked in the forests, and to me in half-panic each shadow seemed a moving beast ready to spring! Yet one grows used to danger, and by the time I reached the branch my spirits were running high. To take the raft across was easy and soon accomplished. I fastened it to the bank, threw water on my footprints as José had directed, then splashing vigorously in the water to frighten away snakes and alligators, I started boldly swimming back. I well knew that there was danger, and that I might never reach the other side, so splashing vigorously I swam with energy, imagining as I went how it would feel if there should come a sudden swirl on the water, the cold nose of an alligator poking against me, and the great jaws closing on my belly to drag me down for ever. I hurried and reached the bank, stopped only a moment to cover my tracks with water, then fled

through the woods to José, who had ready a breakfast of wild yams roasted with fish.

After eating, José explained that we would swim up the branch in front of our camp and thus leave no track for those who sought to follow. Naturally they would notice the track to the other branch, and, seeing our raft, would look for us in that direction.

Without more delay we started to seek the rubber grove, swimming up the branch before our camp. Now I was not afraid and took delight in swimming by José. At intervals we splashed, and struck stones together under the water whenever we stopped to rest to scare away the alligators, and proceeding in this way for about half an hour José said we had gone far enough, and could safely go through the forest. So resting a little, for swimming weakens one's energies, we set out again walking rapidly up the bank of the branch, but on the side opposite to our camp.

After about two hours' walking, we came to quantities of rough stones, with here and there a ledge of rocks showing, signs at which all rubber hunters would turn back, but climbing among them we made our way up and up till presently a ledge of rock was reached, and clambering over this we stood on a sort of terrace sloping down and extending almost northeast and southwest along the mountains. Here the soil was rich, for the humus from decaying leaves collected in overabundance, and there were rubber-trees such as I had never seen or imagined, — a great belt of them continuing for miles as far as the rocky formation extended,

which held the banks in place to form this strange depression against the side of the mountain. The mountain itself was rocky, and both above and below the belt of rubber groves was ground which no rubber hunter would stop to examine. Truly Nature had well hidden her treasure. José explained to me how the belt extended all along the mountainside to a point far up the main river, and to find it one had only to cross the barrier of rocks at any place, though at some points they were too rough to make a way practicable, and the best points of attack were at the terminals near the river or on the branch.

We fell to work with a will. Twenty great trees were hacked to pieces, and the dripping of their life-blood was a merry sound in our ears. I was for tapping all we could and bringing away a great store of rubber, but José said it was useless; no matter how much we might bring, Don Ignacio, might the devil walk with him, would get it all, and still have us in his debt.

"But we have only to give him a certain amount," I protested. "The rest must be ours."

José laughed in bitterness of scorn, he had suffered before and knew, but I doubting asked to bleed a few more trees, that I might try for myself, and have something more than enough to pay up my debts.

"Bleed what you like," said José. "There are enough and to spare." So while he watched me I worked diligently, and soon four more great trees were bleeding profusely.

Then we went away and left the scene of our destruction. In three or four days the rubber would be ready to gather.

Retracing our steps, we went down the river again, swimming as before but not as far as our camp. Presently we left the river, struck out through the woods, came to the other branch, swam it, found one or two rubber-trees, bled them, and then working downstream came to our raft, and as we crossed the river met two of our rivals. José had been right, we had surely been followed but without avail, for our rivals were off the track, and hearing that José had not found any rubber went on their way discontented.

That night we slept at our *rancho* undisturbed, and with morning taking up our *toldas*, set out for the main camp, stopping only to gather the rubber from the trees I had found on the way out. By noontime we were with our companions, and their eager welcome showed plainly that they were glad at our coming. We had not brought much rubber, but a satisfied look on José's face assured them that good supplies would be forthcoming as usual. Ishpin had found some trees and a pile of scrap was gradually accumulating; yet there was not enough to make anything like the amount required to meet our obligations to Don Ignacio. In the other camps they had been even less successful, and at the rate we were accumulating, many days must be spent in the woods before we could hope to return to the rum and debauchery of the village; and while the certainty of a long tedious hunt for supplies became clearly apparent, discontent grew. The other camps blamed José. He knew where rubber could be had, but would not lead them to it, and angry looks with threatening words were frequently heard; yet, we all mingled together with familiar confidence, José

always protesting he knew nothing of any great supplies of rubber. He worked as they worked, and if more successful it was because he worked better than they, that was all.

CHAPTER V

MY DISCOVERY

NEXT day José took a heavy influenza and began to cough, and at times would spit out a little blood. Our men looked serious at this, and Santiago was told to stay close by the captain while the other two men continued to hunt after rubber. José told me to rest for a little, and recommended that I should then go back to our camp on the branch and gather up any scraps which might have collected on the trees we had bled, and he would wait for me, resting in camp.

That night when all was still I went to his *tolda*. Our leader was not sick, that I knew, though he feigned it well. His orders to me were brief indeed. "The rubber is now ready to gather," he said. "Take your *tolda*, go sleep in the groves, gather the rubber together, make a big raft, float it all down to where the two branches meet, and below that place stop, unload the rubber, hide it in the woods, destroy the raft and return." If while I was floating down with the rubber on my raft I should meet any one, he continued, say that he, José, had found a group of great trees between the two branches of the river and that the rubber was being brought out, — that all there was had been taken.

"Tell them it is just another instance of my luck,"

he said, "if you meet them, but try not to meet them at all." Then I went back to my *tolda* to sleep and plan for the morrow. The task would be one requiring strength and endurance. Probably over a thousand pounds of rubber were waiting there in the woods, and I must go alone, overcome all the danger and all the exposure and bring it out to a place of safety.

Next morning I was ready. There was no reason for delaying, and no chance for further consultation with José, in fact he was sick, at any rate apparently, and so cross that no one could say anything to him. Presently he ordered me to go out and clean up the second scrap from the trees we had bled, and when he saw I hesitated, he said sneeringly, "What, afraid, and you would be a rubber hunter! A fine baby you are. Yes, the tigers eat pretty boys; better go home to your mother."

Still reluctant to go, I hesitated; there was something I wanted to say.

"Here, take my gun," he said, "carry your *tolda*, and don't come back till you get the last ounce of rubber."

The gun, that was all I had wanted. How well he had guessed my thoughts! Surely I could not have gone to the woods alone unarmed; so with manifestations of displeasure I set out, and in plain sight of the camp stopped, sat down, looking back as if in defiance. José, sick as he appeared, got up and with angry words and curses drove me on while the other campers mocked at my discomfiture. This gave me a chance to speak with him an instant, and then I went on my way and was out of sight in the great woods, trusted with José's

most valued secret, his own gun for my defence, my heart beating high with expectant hopes. Like an excited animal I chased my way through the woods, fancying always that our rivals were close in pursuit, nor did I stop at all till I reached the branch, forced our craft across it, and then sat down under our little *ranchito*. It was a forlorn-looking place now, and although we had left it only a few days before, around it ferns had sprung up where we had cut them down, and sickly plants were struggling from the ground under the shed, their pale shoots groping for the sunlight. A collection of bats hung at rest in the gloomy protection of the roof near the ridge-pole, and under the eaves a great spider as big as my hand sat patiently waiting.

I did not tarry long, but after resting a few moments made my way through the woods to the other branch, took the raft across, swam back again, and hurrying to the camp caught up gun and *tolda*, and holding them on my head with one hand swam a short distance up the main branch. Feeling that my tracks had been well concealed, I climbed out on the bank, and, hampered only by the thick woods, made all haste toward the rubber groves.

After travelling some time, I began to wonder where the place could have gone. Had I been dreaming? Was it all some fancy that José had taken me into his family? I sat down to consider. I could not be mistaken about the happenings of the past days, yet where were the rubber-trees? I was satisfied that I had come far enough up the branch to have encountered the piles of broken rock, yet where were they? Then I determined to go higher up, perhaps after all I had

not come far enough. For an hour or more I travelled, yet no sign of the rocks which should lead me to my goal. I came to a stream which I felt certain we had not crossed, and feeling sure I had come too far, I was about to retrace my steps, when I thought that perhaps by following up the stream I might find some trace of the rocks. I could do this with impunity as the stream would be a sure guide in retracing my steps to the branch.

So gathering my few belongings, I began my way into the forest. For some time I walked without meeting any favourable conditions, then I suddenly came to a wall of rock, a sheer precipice of a hundred feet or more. Over this the stream came tumbling in a series of cascades; and above, the mountainsides looked rough and unattractive; by certainty no place for rubber. In a spirit of adventure, and hoping to reach a point where I could see something of the broken rocks, I began to climb up the precipice, finding an uncertain way along the side of the stream. A hundred feet or more is not very hard climbing, and soon I stood on the ledge, and there amazed saw that the stream had cut out a basin in the mountainside, a little valley of some hundreds of acres, all deep wooded with rubber. My find was as big as José's. I thought to shout, and send a discharge from my gun to crash with wild echoes among those magnificent trees, but caution forbade. Hastily descending, my troubled position once more forced itself on me, and anxiously I went down the stream, having found no clue at all. I turned back again. The ledge of rock must be on the same mountain where José's rubber-trees

grew, I would follow it and so find my way. The work was not easy, thick jungles of vines and bushes grew at its base, and progress was slow, yet after a time I came to some broken rocks, then the ledge went on as before, more rocks were found, and gradually the ledge blended in with the mountainside and piles of rock were seen at its base. I came to a point where in truth the place looked like that which José had shown me.

Hastily I climbed over the rocks, only to be disappointed, and again I tried at different points, but nothing availed. Yes, José's secret was well guarded. I retraced my steps for a time, tried other places, and finally came to a spot where a depression, marking the course which a stream might have followed, led me over the rocks, but still no results. I might have to go back to José in disgrace. No, I would not, it were better to die in the woods. Sitting now on one of the rocks I felt sure that labour would not find the place. I must think of some plan, a guide from my brain, not the chance of my feet. I determined to climb a tall tree on the hillside, perhaps from the top my eyes might rest on some clue. I was light and strong, and at home to climb was not a great effort; but here in the woods it was different, the tree was much larger than those at home, air plants clung to it impeding my progress, mosses made the trunk slippery, ants stung my naked body, but still I kept on looking anxiously always, till to my delight I saw on the hillside a line of depression, and the soft green that rubber-trees make in the woods. Taking good sight of the place, I hastily let myself down to the ground, hurried forward, and, like one coming home from a troublesome journey, stood

with delight safe in the place I had so earnestly sought.

It was late now, and secure that no one would intrude on me here, I hung my *tolda*, and then went to look at the rubber. What a quantity there was! At the foot of each tree great mushroom-shaped masses had collected in the hollows which we had prepared by scraping out the ground and lining the place carefully with clay.

Twenty of these there were, and four more which I had prepared for myself. Fifty pounds for each would have been a light weight. To me it seemed they were more as I gathered them one after the other and brought all to the side of my *tolda*. Then I fell to work gathering the scrap, long strips which adhered to the trees where the milk had trickled down on its way to the ground. Of this I gathered a goodly pile, and by the time darkness had come all had been collected and carefully stacked by my *tolda*.

Eating the cold plantain and dried meat which made up my only provision, I prepared to rest for the night. The gun was ready and game was more than abundant, yet I dared not shoot, perhaps our rivals might hear; nor dared I light a fire, the smoke might easily betray me. I crawled under my *tolda*, stained now from exposure, my only protection against all the wild beasts of the night, and though my heart beat high with excitement, I knew I was safe. All animals have fear of the *tolda*, and it has been known that a person sleeping quietly alone in the woods will find about him a worn path in the morning made by a jaguar, which for all the night had sought for an opening, and, seeking

a place to attack, had circled around and around, desiring yet fearful.

I knew I was safe, and presently dozing a little fell deeply asleep. Morning came, first a soft light through the woodlands while the air was yet cool from the night, then a thousand gleamings as the sun rose and the woods resounded with the cries and the music of birds. A moment I stopped to drink in the beautiful sight, the sounds of vigorous life, and breathe the pure cool air, and then I set to work. No light task was before me. To and from the river I went many times, at each journey bearing a great precious burden, and at last all was brought safely down to the water. I rested a little, and then made a raft, as José had instructed. Fortunately rubber will float, though its buoyancy is not such as to permit it to bear more than its own weight, so the raft to float out a cargo need not be of great strength.

My work was soon done, and then, sitting at ease, I guided my raft and its cargo quietly down the river. I was hungry, but there was no time to stop and cook, even if I had anything with me. Game was a constant temptation, birds and animals were everywhere, but what was a little hunger compared to the prize I had in my grasp. A shot might call up our rivals, and though I felt sure they were watching José, and giving no thought to the boy who had been sent to bring in the scraps, yet for all this I was anxious, and more than once my heart rose as if choking my throat at some fancied appearance, like a man by the side of the river. My fears were groundless, and quietly down the stream I floated. In the woods any number of men might be

hiding and watching, but I gave no thought to this; nothing hindered my way, and so assured I kept on till our camp came in sight; there all was just as I had left it. No stopping now, here the men of our rivals might be about, but if I met them I knew what to say. My trail would be lost once I was safely below the camp, so onward I urged, left the camp behind me, and presently came where the two branches met.

I stopped and carried our rubber ashore, hid it well in the woods, and went back to the branch, where I cut my raft to pieces and stood a moment watching the logs float slowly down the stream. They passed out of sight and my next care was to kill something for breakfast. Some wood doves flew up and sat in the branches above me. Of these I shot two, then, finding some wild roots which are always fairly abundant, I kindled a fire and soon with toasted birds, and roots roasted well in the coals, had a breakfast such as only a woodman can have. Without heeding further I hurried forward, hoping to reach our camp before night. In this I was successful, and the sunset was glowing when I arrived, though the way had been long and hard.

Indians are so undemonstrative, nothing was said at my arrival. A grunt of good-fellowship, a place for me to sit down, a further supply of food added to that which was being prepared was all. I had brought but a few scraps of rubber with me, for perhaps José would have it appear that I had not gathered much. So it was, and I had done well to obey his orders exactly.

What I had brought I gave to José, and he laughed in derision. "Only some scraps," he said. "While

you were scraping up bits I went out alone and found some wonderful trees just beyond where the branches meet. Later I stored it all. To-morrow we will bring in the harvest. You ought to be made to stay behind, cook and tend camp, but we will let you come, too. To-morrow you will see how fresh rubber looks."

Boasting were his words, sarcastic his voice, and but for the strength born of knowing it all myself, I would have flared out in rebellion. As it was, the sneering looks of our rivals for me meant nothing; their angry looks at José, these were dangerous. Obey orders, always obey, and remembering his former instructions I took up my knife, drew myself reasonably near to José and sat down. One quick, sharp look he gave me, — to others it might seem a menacing, threatening look, — but it was a flash of approval, noted only by me, and was more than enough. I knew what to do.

CHAPTER VI

THE RUBBER HARVEST

THAT night when we slept José put his *tolda* inside, mine was next to the open part of our camp. Rest was not easy, suppressed excitement was everywhere present, but at last the night's peace brooded within as well as without our little group of encampments, and I cautiously crept out from my *tolda*, and made my way into José's. Our captain was waiting and I knew what he wanted. A few brief words were sufficient to tell him just where our rubber was hidden. Without a word further I went back to my *tolda* to rest and to sleep.

It was natural that I should sleep late after the effort and excitement of the previous day, but I was not prepared for the rough treatment I received when morning came. True it was wrong for me to be late, when so much work was waiting, but when José reached under my *tolda* and dragged me out naked and still half asleep, shook me, called me Señor, mocked me with big words, saying my servants were ready, coffee was served, would the Señor deign to get up and take what his peons had ready, I suffered an impression that remains to this day. A wild burst of anger filled my mind, I thought to call out and betray the secret he had

kept so long, but I stopped to consider. Reflecting, I watched him an instant, and saw that anger was not in his eyes, and while the words mocked me and the sinewy arm shook me from one side to another, the strength was so exerted that its force was relieved, as one might toss a baby about for its pleasure, moving it violently but checking the shock.

All the people joined in the mocking, and I, making a fine show of passion, sat there by the river, naked, distressed, served by my friends while they mocked me.

José had well covered his tracks. How could our opponents conceive that the angry, buffeted boy who brought nothing but a few scraps had really won confidence from his captain, and by his own strength had brought out and hidden a great store of rubber? We had eaten and were ready to go to the woods. José called us, saying he would show a supply of rubber which would permit our returning to the village and rest for days, perhaps even weeks. Our rivals looked on in anger, I in the deepest of wonder, as if I could scarcely believe that such things were true. Expectation lends wings to one's feet, steadily onward and onward we went, one keeping step after the other, five Indians in silence hurrying on through the woods. We were not long on the way, though I lagged somewhat behind, complaining that I was tired and sore in my feet. Small comfort I got, but rough words were nothing to me. It seemed best that I should be well in the rear of the others and apparently have little interest in what we were doing.

Presently, on in advance, I heard a great shouting. The store had been found, a supply such as José had

rarely brought out. I joined them while the excitement was still running high and allowed them to point out to me all the conditions which were taken to mean that the rubber was good in quality, equal to any which had ever been found. Then we debated the question as to which were the easier, to carry the rubber out through the woods, or to do two days' work, perhaps more, in bringing the canoe around up the branch. At last we decided to carry the rubber out to our camp, and at once set to work.

From the trumpet-trees down by the water, long, broad strips of soft inner bark were carefully gathered; of these, rough hammock-like slings were quickly prepared, by knotting the strips one with the other, a broad band at one side left to go over the forehead, while the burden would hang on the shoulders and back. What a weight an Indian can carry! Twenty-four great cakes of more than fifty pounds each there were, besides great bundles of scrap. Of the cakes, José gathered the eight largest up in his burden, Santiago took four, and I, determined not to be outdone, took an equal number for my burden, and the other two men carried the remainder. Then the struggle home through the woods was begun, my first experience of packing. Stolidly on through the forests we went, bowed down beneath the burdens we carried, our feet striking hard on the ground from the weight they supported, making a dull beating sound. We kept on without stopping, on and on it was, always on, while my burden grew heavier and heavier still. My neck and arms ached, my back stiffened with a pain growing more intense every minute, shooting down through my legs

to my feet which burned as they pounded the ground. I struggled on; I would not give up. The others should not see me fail, though, for my first burden, wisdom would have been to take but two of the great round lumps of rubber. Yet I forced myself on, and after a time a numbness came in place of the pain, a dull suffering with my heart beating more than it should, but I would keep on and on and then, when more time had passed, the burden did not seem so heavy.

No words were spoken, sweat gathered and dropped from our brows, yet nobody stopped. What use would that be? Better force one's way on while the back was accustomed, and not break into the load and make two burdens, for the first of the labour is more cruel than all that comes after, and so we kept on. In time the camp was reached and in our *rancho* we threw down our burdens. What a strange feeling came then, a sort of cold chill on the back, the surging of blood up to the head and a lightness of body which seemed not weighty enough to keep one's step firm on the earth. We dropped down to rest, rubber and Indians all tumbled together, but this was not for long. José, rising first, called the others, but bade that I remain in the camp to keep watch of the rubber and prepare a big dinner, because that night we would start down the river. My companions took food in their hands and hurried away to the woods and I was alone. How delicious it was to rest in that warm air by the river! After a time I would go in and swim, but now I wanted only to remain still and do nothing. I was not afraid, there was nothing to fear. Our rivals would claim a share in our trees were they able to find them, but once the

rubber was gathered and brought into camp it was ours and no one would touch it. I knew that José had left me in camp because I had done my full share of the work and he wished I should have a fair turn at resting, and then was I not of his household? Sitting and dreaming while the breezes brought music and the river talked to me, great were the thoughts of a boy whose life-blood burned hot in his veins! The sunshine was warm and the blue sky clear; health and enough for my wants, these were mine. What more could one wish? The world seemed good to me then.

After a time going into the woods, I shot a pair of great turkeys, black with crested feathers standing up on their heads. The meat was as white as the feathers were dark, all white, no brown meat anywhere, and all equally tender. The birds I put on to stew with plantain and yucca and a little savoury to make the broth better. I caught some fish from the river, and, cleaning them, wrapped them up in green leaves and set them aside to be roasted over the coals. The flour we had left, I mixed up with water and salt, making a stiff paste; this I rolled out in thin strips, wrapping each in a cover of soft green leaves ready for toasting over the fire. All preparations were made and a feast would be ready. My companions might come when they would.

A little while I waited, then impatient went to look up the path, paying small heed to the fact that some of our rivals had returned. I had been told to keep close to our rubber, and I should not have gone. I was not away long, but enough for harm to be done.

I had seen nothing, but presently there was an odour

of smoke, more than could have come from my fire. In an instant I had returned. The camp was deserted; a ripple disturbing the river gave tale of a fleeing canoe. Our camp was threatened with fire; our rivals had not set the torch to our thatch, but some one had left fire near it. One edge was smouldering, soon it would burst into flame and all would be lost. Instinct was to rush and endeavour to beat out the fire. My first thought was to know better, for whatever disturbs smouldering palm leaves must stir them to flame. Without considering further, while the smoke grew thicker as the smouldering increased, I made a dash for our *rancho*. One after the other the heavy pieces of rubber were rolled out from under the threatened roof. Inside the smoke was dangerously stifling. With the energy of one who knows he has done wrong and fears the reproach of his friends as well as the loss of his prestige, I worked in a frenzy of strength tearing down and removing *toldas*. I did not notice that flames were beginning to creep along the base of our roof; our rubber was just outside and I thought beyond immediate danger. Our other equipment had all been removed, when with a roar of energy the flames burst out, rising like threatening demons menacing even to heaven.

Our rubber was again in danger. The heat was so intense that it blistered my skin, yet I would not flinch, but stood moving our treasure a piece at a time further and further away. Some pieces were blistered a little, but none had taken fire, and the loss was nothing at all.

Sharp pains gave warning too late that my skin had fared worse than the rubber. A wild shout from the

woods, and my companions, mad resentment burning hot in their eyes, supposing that all had been lost, came at full speed running toward me. In an instant my pains were forgotten. A pause, no words, but in a second they saw and knew all; then from their eyes the burning light faded, the intense lines of expression of hate and resentment were gone like a shadow that passes, and the stolid lines of the calm Indian countenance were all that I saw.

"Who did it?" was all José asked, but I could not answer. "Ha! You will grow wise by and by," he replied, as if to himself, then without any words of reproach he bade the men go to the woods and bring leaves such as he wanted, and at their coming these were taken and pounded together, making a pulpy mass. He spread it all on my burns, which by this time had become keenly painful. Then the burning ceased and I was at rest.

Presently the men went back in the woods to pick up the rubber scrap they had dropped in rushing to the camp, and I sat on a log by the river. It had all come and gone so quickly that it scarcely seemed real that a roar and blazing of fire, a passing of an intense heat, had destroyed the camp. Only a smouldering ruin remained to mark where it stood, but our rubber was safe and that was enough.

Now from the woods my companions came bringing the store of rubber scrap rolled into bundles. Our opponents saw and made no comment; only jealous, bitter looks told of their feelings. Were they to fight us? No words were spoken, and matters hung in the balance when José ordered the rubber aboard our

canoe. A stout craft she was, made from one great log of mahogany hollowed out from end to end and cleverly shaped, evenly formed with a projecting platform at either end, a convenient place where he who poled might stand or sit as he would.

Steadily our men worked. Great as our canoe was, the burden all but overtaxed its capacity, and our opponents saw it but made no sign. All was ready, and, with shouts of delight at our success and shouting to frighten any spirits of evil which might be about to beset our way, we let ourselves swing gently out into the river. The current quietly bore our craft away, our rivals looking on from the banks of the river.

Then José, raising his voice, called back, "I told you I could find rubber where you could find none. I have no secret, the rubber is all through the woods. Go search for yourselves, you waste your time following me."

Muttered words which we knew to be curses were the only response. A curse is not good, so remembering the sign of the cross, I made it with reverence, at which my companions all laughed and started to mock me. But I knew what that sign had done, and José bade them be still, though he said in surprise that he didn't know that the boy had taken up with the priests.

Then we all became silent, evening was coming, long shadows floated over the river. The current bore us along without effort of ours; a paddle, lazily splashed in the water from time to time, guided our way. The white herons standing where the water was shallow started up and then settled back, our course was so peaceful it did not disturb them. Onward we glided,

a rippling sensation of motion lulling our tired bodies to tranquil pulsations of rest. Nobody spoke. We rested among peaceful glidings and ripples onward.

Late we continued, till, when night was well advanced and the young moon had gone down, José chose a well-hidden spot for our camp. Having carefully concealed our precious cargo by dragging the canoe well in among branches which bent to the river, we made our *rancho*, and after eating the dinner which I had prepared and we had carefully brought with us, we all went to sleep, resting secure till the morning.

With the first break of day we made hasty coffee, and hurried again on our way, expecting to reach our village that night if no trouble befell us. We worked now, for our limbs were well rested, and thoughts of life in the village strengthened our arms and made our hearts eager.

Down-stream is easy and good progress was ours. Breakfast was taken as usual, but we did not stop to rest through the heat of the day, and when evening was coming the well-known bend in the river rose in sight. A few seconds more and we were passing around it, and José, taking a conchshell, blew the well-known call of a party returning. Before us we saw the village by the side of the river, people had heard the call, and, as blast followed blast on the conchshell, came from their houses, excitedly running to stand on the bluff and watch us come in. Women and children stood talking together and making excited signals. As our canoe drew nearer to them, we saw the hated form of Don Ignacio avariciously waiting to pounce on our rubber.

A little longer and our canoe grounded at the landing, heavily scraping the sand because of the burden it carried. Women and children came flocking about, a babel of voices all around us, while Don Ignacio's men took charge of our cargo and began at once to carry it up to his storehouse. My first rubber hunting was over. All thoughts of the forest and our struggles were now banished, to-night and for nights succeeding we would revel in plenty.

CHAPTER VII

AN INDIAN WEDDING

José went to his house, I following in response to his signal, and there we were alone. His women were all at the canoe gathering up his belongings, and my woman, as well as my mother, were there with the others to see that my little equipment was safe. Of them we had taken little notice, though when occasion offered we fought hard enough for our women, when others attempted to entice them from us.

In the inner recesses of his house José began praising all I had done, lavishing affections on me which I returned. Times come when our feelings are unrestrained. We were alone. José took me to his arms, great muscular arms, and I was adopted; held as a son drawn close to him that I might be of his own. Henceforth I would follow and always obey him. The boy had found a father and I was to be of his family. Such was the compact between us; understood, not sealed with a writing. Our way is more sacred.

Soon we heard the women bringing our things. His women came in while my woman went on to my grandmother's hut. José directed where the various articles should be put, and then ordered his women to clean up a place at one side of the room, where another

bed might be made. They knew what was coming, and with looks, angry in protest, obeyed his instructions; then sulking went each to her own place in the house.

Presently they brought us food, roast meat and roast vegetables with fruit and afterwards coffee. These we ate without pausing, for we were well hungry, the women standing near us and serving.

When we had finished, José went to his storeroom and brought out a roll of bright calico. This he gave to me and on it laid five bright silver dollars, saying, "Go bring your mother. Come here yourself. Bring here your woman." Then turning to his angry women with a grave gesture, said, "You have heard. So it shall be."

Without delay I hurried to my grandmother's hut, where my woman had food ready waiting, anxious at my delay. Proudly I went in, spoke no words, but stood showing the cloth and the silver. The women, amazed, knew what it meant, but waited to hear who had sent it. Only the grandmother was angry and anxious. Before her on the ground I laid the cloth and the silver and said, "José bids you greeting and sends you this cloth and this silver, because your daughter he will take to himself, and I have agreed, being of man's stature and of years to decide. My mother will go."

The old woman broke into angry words and protestings, what a dog of a grandson was I who shattered her household, in place of bringing women to serve her! Why should I wish to go to José, when for years she had been providing for me, and now that I was first



gathering strength, would leave her? No, the price was not sufficient. Ten times that and my mother should not go away. She should stay and serve the grandmother's old years, and my woman should stay and serve, too.

There were many words and protestings like these, and angry efforts to prevent our effects being gathered together. A woman of terrible aspect was my grandmother. How I had drudged and slaved for her when but a boy, while my companions were free to follow their own happy fancies! Now let her cook and serve for herself! She would not be in want; food and calico always would be hers in plenty. Let her scold and protest, we soon would be rid of her now.

Our goods were not of great volume, and soon all were gathered together. The people, hearing the loud, angry scoldings, had collected about our door, and knew that my mother was again to be woman to some man of the village. They all wondered, for age tells fast on an Indian, and my mother, though strong and well moulded, was no longer attractive of face.

Taking up our belongings, we went out in the evening. Behind us we slammed a great mahogany board against the entrance, completely barring it up; we left the old woman behind and eagerly now took our way, many people following. How elated we were! My mother, how proudly she walked! She had been thrown out long ago, and now, while young girls were waiting, she had been chosen to be a woman again to a man. The people who followed were wondering; from among the excited voices that rose up behind us, some said

I had taken a house of my own and it was as grandmother, not as woman, my mother was going; others said Don Ignacio was taking her back, because I had proved a great rubber-hunter.

Our way was not direct to José's house; turning to one side and then to another our course was marked through all the village, the people following and guessing till we had passed every house except José's and Don Ignacio's. One or the other it must be. Then down a little street we turned that would lead us out by Don Ignacio's storehouse.

That was it, I heard them say. I was to live in the storehouse and have charge of the rubber. The jealous people were silent, angry resentment lighting up in their eyes. There was a sigh of relief when we had passed it; I was too young to be made a captain.

Our secret was out, as we turned toward José's house, and, cheering and running before us, the people all gathered in front of the door as we went in. Gravely José received us, assigned to my mother her place in the house, to my woman pointed out the part where she and I were to live. José and I sat down in our hammocks; and, busily working, my mother and woman began at once arranging their part of the household. José's two women looked on, angry and resentful; at the door the people stood watching, crowding each other for room to see in, yet not daring to enter. Truly they were expecting a scene, and at that instant it came. A gourd rolled from my mother's hand, a little way from her part of the house to that of one of the other women, — she had not succeeded in arranging her place without making a trespass.

With a scream of displeasure and cries that she keep to her own part of the house, the other women were at her; my woman springing to join in the fight against the other two of the household. They were strong women and made a fine show of arms, legs, and bodies as they fought, scratching, biting, and struggling together. The house was a turmoil. Outside the people urged on the fight, shouting their approval, and José and I looked on, proposing to let them have it out with themselves. Presently the row grew hotter. The struggling contestants, not noticing what they did, fell over against us and broke down our hammocks, an act meriting punishment. They might fight as they would, so long as we were not disturbed, but now they must stop. José was on his feet in an instant, grabbed the first woman on whom his hands fell, beat her and cuffed her, slinging her into her part of the house, and so with the other two, my mother coming in for her share; each was beaten and cuffed. Meanwhile my woman received from me her full share of chastisement.

Finally all promised to live in peace with the others, obeying José. After that my mother, my woman, and I were reckoned part of his household. Soon the place was rearranged. Scattered gourds, wooden cooking-utensils and other belongings were found and identified by their owners, and then the women set to work preparing dinner, having first comforted and put to sleep their crying babies and wondering children, for José had a large family. When the little ones had grown quiet my woman whispered that one was coming to me in due time, and I felt happy and proud.

Food was brought and we fell to eating again. It is said Indians are always hungry, and I think it is true. I know we missed no opportunity when food could be had.

CHAPTER VIII

IN DEBT

IN the morning, all eagerness, we waited before Don Ignacio's house. "We will do well," I whispered; "we brought more than enough to settle our debts." But José shook his head and answered, "In that you did wrong; it is useless to bring more than enough. You will see and learn for yourself."

Don Ignacio slept late, or perhaps he found it good business to tire us with waiting, for though the men always came early, he always was late; but this morning it was not such a very long time, and Don Ignacio looked pleasant. He called José into his house and gave him rum, of which he drank eagerly and still more eagerly. Some portion was served to the men, and I was also given to drink and urged to take more. The will of a Spaniard is stronger than that of an Indian, and I only pretended to drink, though I liked rum as well as the others. When the heart was happy and the lips open and free, Don Ignacio showed us a new lot of goods, and soon the men were in debt, even José taking more than he should, but I, pretending to be stupidly drunk, took no notice at all. There was more rum, and then down to the storehouse we went, to settle accounts; the Indians too drunk to know what they did, while I,

pretending to be in the same condition as the rest, came staggering after.

Once in the storehouse, we set about dividing our shares of rubber among ourselves, a work quickly accomplished. Don Ignacio's eyes snapped with pleasure, and surprise, too, at the share which fell to my lot. He took up two weights and showed them to us, saying each represented fifty pounds, and with them the men settled their dues, paying in hundredweights of rubber. Each came out more in debt than before, but were too drunk to take notice. Finally my turn came. "Well, what do you want?" Don Ignacio asked. "My book shows you owe four hundred pounds of fine rubber. I suppose you want more things for that woman of yours, rum for yourself, and perhaps a gun?"

I only shook my head, and pushed my stick toward him, showing where he himself had cut two full notches and a half, meaning two hundred and fifty pounds.

"What, you in my debt, and dare to contest my accounts!" he roared, clutching one hand on his pistol. I looked on, drunkenly stupid, but made no protest at all.

"Come," said Don Ignacio, now trying to entice me, "you know the books must be true. You get more things for your woman, give me your rubber, and take some goods for yourself and again for your woman. No need for fear of me," he laughed. "I will always have goods for you, while the woods contain rubber. Come, your woman is waiting."

Still stupidly drunk, I sat and made no reply. I knew that I did not owe four hundred pounds of rubber, yet what could I do? Then I said, "Give me flour to

pay for my rubber." At once other scales were brought, and they began to weigh flour.

"Not so," I said. "I want my flour on the same scales on which you weigh my rubber."

Don Ignacio gave a quick, angry look. "But those scales are dirty; they will spoil your flour," he said.

"I don't care. Weight for weight, that's what I want."

"How dare you talk that way to me! You owe me. Do you think the prison is sweet?" and he struck me a blow on the face with his whip.

Still I made no response, but, pretending to cower in fear, asked him to take the four hundred pounds of rubber. This he did. It was nearly all of my pile, though I knew that my share was more than six hundred pounds. Then standing up, I said, "Weigh it now on the scales on which you sell flour, or else I will call on Don Jaime to help me."

An angry flash in his eye was my only answer. Knife in hand I stood guarding my own. "Oh," he sneered, "you think Don Jaime would help you? A fine life there was in the village with him before I came here."

My companions until now had looked on in amazement. To question the acts of one's *patrón* seemed impossible. "Give and take on the same scales, that only is fair," I said. "Weigh it now on the scales with which you sell flour."

"The scales weigh the same," he replied, and Don Jaime, standing outside, laughed and the people crowded in closer.

Then my chance came.

"Don Ignacio, you lie!" and, like a tiger springing

upon him, all the hate of long years lending force to my act, I bore him to the ground and, struggling with him, called on Don Jaime to rescue my rubber.

Don Jaime's men were ready enough, and soon, scarcely more than an instant, were bearing my rubber away, taking all to Don Jaime's storehouse. Springing lightly from my struggles with Don Ignacio, I fled through the door, seeking to reach a place of safety before he could shoot. So quick was my flight that I got away all unharmed, though two shots rang out in the air, and later I found that a bullet had cut the flesh on my arm.

I was free, and it was worth all the risk. Not delaying an instant, I sought Don Jaime's house, knowing that there I would find protection and fair treatment at first, because I was now of José's family and the rivals were eager to own José, but Don Jaime's reputation when he had no rivals had been such that all dreaded to be in his debt.

Debt was now a necessity for me, because I must have protection. I gave him my stick and told him to pay Don Ignacio all that I might owe. Two hundred and fifty pounds were set aside, and then liberally treated, I got good pay for what remained, and went into debt for one bottle of rum, though Don Jaime urged that I should take more; but I had seen enough of being in debt. It was too much like slavery, and being well supplied with provisions, took no more.

Notice was served on Don Ignacio that I was Don Jaime's man, and so I was safe, for, however the rivals might hate each other, one would not dare harm the other's man. Gathering up my goods and staggering

under the burden, I went to our house and gave all to my woman for safe-keeping.

While waiting for José to return, I sat in our house thinking and planning. A boy oftentimes grows to manhood in a day, or perhaps he comes in a day to know that he has reached man's full discretion. I would not be in debt to those men, not ever, and I would make them angry fighting to get me and the rubber I might find. I would not go back to the woods till they had gone, and then I would get a great store of rubber and hide it. I would go with the priest when he came to our village, and learning from him, would be able to protect my own rights. I sat dreaming how much one could do if one were but wise, and knew how to read and perhaps even to write, and on my wings of fancy education seemed to open the way to everything in all the world. So, letting my thoughts run free, I waited, and presently José came in staggering drunk, and in debt still more for the goods he was bringing home to his women. With a leering and laughing he came toward me.

"Beautiful fight. Punched Don Ignacio well, but never mind now. He wants more rubber. We must go again to the woods."

"But I belong to Don Jaime," I said. "Still you can't go without me, and I can't go with you."

Stupidly he looked at me a moment, then in drunken rage would have felled me to the ground; but he was drunk, I was sober. Calmly I looked at him. What had come to me to make me so strong? Man's strength had come in a day.

José became quiet, and stood looking at me. "Lis-

ten," I said, "we do not go to the woods. Let the Dons contend together, each for a share in the rubber we find; they will never agree. Then we can ask them to wait till the priest comes and he will settle it all. I will set them one on the other, never fear. Rest now, you always wanted rest."

So I and the women, entreating and pleading, got José in his hammock, where he soon fell asleep. What a surprise I was to myself! I only, of all our party, was not drunk and still more in debt. Now I resolved I never would be drunk, never again when work was to be done.

When José was well asleep, I hurried and sought out Don Jaime, hearing again the tale of how José had been ordered to go at once to the woods and gather more rubber. "But he can't go without me," I said, "and I belong to you."

A cunning expression came over Don Jaime's cruel face. Here was a chance to thwart his rival. In an instant a messenger went to Don Ignacio, saying that part of the crew who would go to hunt rubber with José belonged to Don Jaime, and he forbade their going, but offered, however, to pay up the debts of José if the settlement would be accepted. Soon there was excitement in the village. Don Ignacio's men were seen forcing José to go with them to their master's house. I knew José was too drunk to make any serious trouble, and as delay was what I wanted, I did nothing myself but in Don Jaime's house sat and waited.

Presently a man, sent by José, came to call me, but I only sent back word that I belonged to Don Jaime and could not come. This was rebellion in José's

own household, yet it was best. Sooner or later I would have a chance to talk with him alone and thwart Don Ignacio's plans, which too plainly were nothing but to force such rubber as he could out of José by keeping him continuously in the woods till he could no longer be of service, and then let him die in debt.

The hours passed and nothing happened. Noon-time came, and Don Jaime had breakfast sent to me, and I ate full and enough. I heard that Don Ignacio was raging about in fury, threatening death if his plans were thwarted. He demanded more rubber from poor José, and the good Indian became half-beside himself with fear at the violent threatenings. Why should an Indian fear a Spaniard? I could not think, but I knew José would not go to the woods without me and take the great risk of showing others his rubber.

Then came the scene I was expecting. Don Ignacio himself, with his two strongest men, came, bringing José to Don Jaime's house. A few strained but polite words passed, and then Don Ignacio made his proposition that the expedition should start without delay, with five men to go as usual, four belonging to him and one belonging to Don Jaime.

"Certainly that is correct," Don Jaime said, "but the rubber? How shall that be divided?"

"How divided? Why, by numbers, of course. Each man a share; four to me and one to you."

"But my man is a great rubber-hunter," Don Jaime replied, with a show of humble politeness.

"Great nothing! A boy is what you call your man. A boy, nothing more."

"But if he knows the trees and the other men not?"

"He knows nothing, I tell you."

"Joaquín, come here," said Don Jaime.

I came respectfully, and stood as if waiting his orders.

"Do you know where José's rubber-trees are?"

"Yes, and my own. I have more than he."

There was a look of triumph from Don Jaime.

"José, come here," roared Don Ignacio.

José came, a beseeching look on his face, its intelligence lost in a drunken expression.

"You have secret rubber-trees?" Don Ignacio asked.

"No, Señor *Patrón*, no, no. I have no secrets at all," he protested.

"And you," said Don Jaime, turning to me, "have you secret trees in the woods?"

"Yes, I have, and can defend them, too," I said, standing boldly before them. Perhaps it was not wise to assert independence so soon, so I added, hastily, "But always to serve my *patrón*."

This pleased Don Jaime and angered his rival. "So you see," Don Jaime said, "my man has rubber-trees. If he goes to the woods I have half of the returns."

"You half the rubber!" Don Ignacio said, springing up to his feet. "You half! You liar and thief to steal my men!"

"Steal your men! Your man knocked you down and then came to me! Come, business is business. Let them go to the woods; half for you, half for me."

"Not ever. I'll let them stay here and rot before I'll consent," and Don Ignacio seemed to hesitate, his hand seeking his pistol.

"Come, none of that," Don Jaime said, sternly, "you know the revenge my family could take."

Don Ignacio made no reply. Then he said, "I will not consent. I grant you a quarter in place of a fifth."

"No, half or nothing," and Don Jaime gave a quick, cold laugh.

"Then let the men arrange it, and let each make the best bargain he can for his *patrón*."

Don Jaime agreed to let us talk it over. Don Ignacio went back to his house and I went with José. With José still drunk and I determinedly sober, that day I came to know the power of self-control. Alone with José, he began to chide and then abuse me for what I had done. I interrupted him, saying, "José, let me speak and tell you my plan. We will not go to the woods, but will go back and say that we cannot agree, and say that we must wait till the priest comes to settle our differences. When the other crews come down the river, bringing their rubber, our *patróns* will go to the seaport. This will be our opportunity. We will go to the woods alone, let the people think we have gone hunting, and will collect a great store of rubber, enough to last a long time, years perhaps. This we will hide in the woods for you to use while I am gone, for I am going away with the priest, to learn to protect what is mine. The *patróns* can never agree, and we need not agree. This is our chance. It's for freedom — freedom, José."

He made no reply, only stared at me with wonder in his eyes. Who ever heard of an Indian doing aught but serve his *patrón*? José was not so drunk as he looked, cunning José, and he made a sign that I should

be still. Long he thought, and then said, "Perhaps it can be as you say. Your plan is good, but I doubt the priests. You are young and do not know them yet. Let it appear, however, that we cannot agree."

José staggered to his house, to be ministered to by his women. I went to Don Jaime with my good companion's message, planning as I went how to contrive that the *patrons* might also disagree still further, for I knew they wanted rubber and would do anything, even make peace with each other, to get it.

"José will not give me half," I said.

Don Jaime looked disappointed, an expression of anger coming over his face. "We might force him. You are a fine boy, and I could make you a captain."

"No, not yet; the men would kill me. They don't like that one gets on too fast."

"Well, arrange with José as best you can, and get to the woods. We must get more rubber."

"José will not agree or let me have any share. I must work for him; I belong to his family. If we go now it will only be to make Don Ignacio richer. José says we will wait till the priest comes, and let him settle our differences."

"No, you go now."

"To make Don Ignacio richer? The little I owe would soon be repaid you. He, not you, will gain if we go now to the woods."

"Take more goods, then. Give me the pledge for my rubber."

"I want nothing more. If you force me to go, you let Don Ignacio benefit; help me to stay here, and you check his prosperity."

"You rascal, you wish to stay here!"

"I do not like to be much in debt. I will not be. I do not care to serve Don Ignacio, but I think we will go. He is too clever for you."

Angrily Don Jaime listened. No peon had ever spoken so boldly before.

"Have your own way, then, but by checking Don Ignacio, how will I gain?"

"And if Don Ignacio dies?" I whispered, adding, "I hate him! Do this for me now; break up his expeditions. If he were not so rich and strong, something might happen to him."

Suspicious uncertain eyes rested on me. Could Don Jaime believe his ears,—the thing he most wanted proposed by a boy? Suspicious looks, dark, searching looks, were directed at me. With a nervous step he walked to the door, looked out, then came back, hesitated, and said, "If you wish not to serve Don Ignacio, wait if you will. Let the priest settle your differences; he will be coming here shortly."

"Keep it so. Do not let Don Ignacio prevail," I replied, and hurried to carry the news to José.

Soon I was in his house, and we were consulting in whispers. So far our plan had worked well. I was somewhat troubled lest José should continue drinking, but a new hope seemed to come to the old man. My plan had taken deep hold in his mind. Rum he would not touch, even when his women brought a supply to him. Now he had something to hope for; yesterday his only thought was to enjoy what he could, and in spite of harsh treatment go back to the woods, serving Don Ignacio, to whom in some measure he was attached because of long service.

CHAPTER IX

THE DRINK FEAST

Now days passed in idleness and hung heavily. Constantly Don Ignacio ordered us off to the woods, and as frequently Don Jaime made opposition, I inventing stories as to how Don Ignacio was planning to get an extra amount of rubber for the purpose of making some kind of trouble for Don Jaime, but exactly what it was I said I could not understand, yet I thought it had something to do with denouncements, that Don Jaime was planning a revolution or something of the kind here in the woods.

I noticed that at times Don Jaime looked anxious when I told him these things, and one day I said I had heard Don Ignacio say he would gather his rubber together and get down the river first, and being on the ground could denounce Don Jaime as he would. When I told him this my *patrón* looked troubled and I laughed in my heart.

Then instructing José, I had the same story carried to Don Ignacio, — how that presently Don Jaime would gather his rubber together and take his party down the river to denounce Don Ignacio as fomenting a great revolution here in the woods. The bad blood between our *patróns* grew hotter. Good Saints! but

they were ready to kill one another. How I laughed and hated them all the while!

As the days went by rubber crews came back from the woods, all successful to some extent, and our rivals among the others brought well of rubber, but in small bundles of scrap, showing that they had worked at numerous trees. Our secret was safe, for had they found our trees they would have brought great masses, not little bundles of scrap.

Now there was feasting and revelling in the village, for each man who brought rubber was rewarded by an additional credit of rum, pork, flour, and dry-goods to be worked out and paid for by their services in presently going with their *patróns* to the seaport with the rubber.

We had heard that the priest was coming. This was the time of his harvest, and he would surely appear to gather his tithes and contributions, which we all paid for fear of him. It was my object to get the *patróns* started down the river before the priest came if I could.

One day I said to Don Jaime, "My good *patrón*, Don Ignacio has his rubber all ready. He could go down the river any time now."

"Well, so could I."

"But if Don Ignacio starts first and spreads his stories?"

This was all I said, but I noticed that Don Jaime urged his men in their work preparing his rubber for shipment.

Then José said to Don Ignacio, "Don Jaime urges the work of getting his rubber ready. Soon he will go away and not give us warning."

"What of that? Let him go."

"But how about those stories of his that you are to make war on the government? I will fight with you, but it cannot be well that Don Jaime should get down the river first with this news."

"I start no war on the government. Jaime lies."

"A harmful lie it will be. What will the authorities do when they hear it?"

"José," said Don Ignacio, suddenly, "I start to-morrow. Get yourself ready to go with me."

"Me? I must stay to watch that boy Joaquín."

Don Ignacio made unwilling assent. No sooner had I heard the news than I carried it straight to Don Jaime.

"Let it be so," he said. "You are daring; get ready to go with me. I start to-morrow."

"Not so. I must stay to watch that man José. We did find some good trees together; a few, but they were great ones. If I go he will get all the rubber. We will get none."

"I may need men more than rubber, but let it be as you say."

Now word went through the village that next day the *patrons* would go down the river. That night all must feast, for to-morrow there would be no time for pleasure. An Indian feast is a great occasion, and we have them whenever we can, for it is good to be happy.

It seemed that my work was finished, and I meant that night to drink as I had never yet done. Even should my tongue be loosened, it would, I thought, make little difference. José, too, could drink and be happy. All that day we were busy making the *misilech*, that is, the drink feast. José's house was to be the place

where we all would meet, and there preparation was the busiest. From time to time women came bringing hammocks, which were hung in such places as suited their fancy. Presently every space had been taken, and some hammocks were even hung under the eaves, and others in the nearest houses, till finally all who would had a place provided.

Meanwhile the supplies of strong drink were being made. Women and girls were sitting before wooden troughs chewing great quantities of sugar-cane, and ejecting the juice, till after a time three great troughs had been filled. In the same way ripe bananas were chewed and other troughs filled, the accumulated mass being thinned with water.

Then from the woods groups of people came, bringing mysterious packages wrapped up in great leaves, the packages plainly showing that they had been buried in the mud for some days. In them were masses of boiled yucca, which had been chewed by the women, and the resulting mass tied up in *vijou* leaves and buried in the mud to ferment. The contents of some were so old they had become sour and strong; others not so old had a delicate sweet flavour, and were at the same time rich in fermentation. These, mixed with gourds of water, were considered the choicest drink we could have, and even rum was not so highly esteemed, but there were few such packages. Most were strong and sour, while others had scarcely fermented at all and would be little more than yucca paste mixed with water.

The boys, my former companions, were busy, and for the first time I was not with them. I would sit

down with the men, and the women would serve me. Presently from different parts of the village came the sound of reed pipes being toned up by the boys, who would make music that our feast might be more attractive. Then impatient we waited.

Late in the afternoon word went out that the *misilech* was ready, and men began to gather at José's house, for now all were friends. With a grunt by way of salutation each came and took his place, lying at ease in his hammock. A group of boys set up a rhythmic monotonous toning of the reed pipes, those who were older among them looking on me with envious eyes. The women came bringing great gourds of drink which we loved, my woman seeing to it that I was well served, and others too brought me to drink. Evidently I was well in their favour; and as the drink burned in my veins, my passions rose higher and higher.

Our tongues became loosened, the music the boys made on the pipes became more intense, then waveringly uncertain, for they too had been served with strong drink. Still deeper we drank, and now, too, the women were drinking. The babble of voices grew louder, some jesting and happy, some angry and assertive. Night had come, black shadows contended with the light of the fires, reeking fumes of strong fermentation filled the air, bats circled in and out, attracted by the odours and light. Wild were our shouts, thick our voices, our brains reeled, our veins were all on fire with drink, our lusts burned hot, and the women were drunk as ourselves. In our wild joy of the *misilech*, which makes drunk slowly, and stupefies only after long hours of drinking, it was a debauchery wild, un-

restrained. The *misilech* and its wild orgies are the Indian's destruction.

The Spaniards with their men remained in their houses. They knew better than to intrude, for had strangers, not of our blood, come to mingle with us when our women were by, swift vengeance of death would have been visited on them. The *misilech* and all its wild orgies and debauchery was our own custom and none but our people might have a part in it.

Of drink there was no limit, and the night became hideous. Toward morning the silence of stupefaction began its reign, and when the sun arose, it might well have reddened with shame to illumine such a vile sight of bloated bodies lying about where they had fallen, with bellies protruding, distorted like pigs after unrestrained swilling. Some had been fighting, and on their wounds blood was clotted. It was a scene of debauchery to its last excesses, naked bodies lying where each had fallen paralyzed from the drink.

The sun was up, day had come, the *misilech* was over. Don Jaime's men and Don Ignacio's men were loading their boats, but of this we knew nothing; blissful stupefaction, that was our part.

Some hours later I was vaguely disturbed by a voice saying, "What a time they must have had last night! This is the worst I ever have seen. Luckily the house is near the river."

Then on my heated body came a splashing flood of cold water, chilling even the flesh next my bones. My eyes opened wide, and like very fiends incarnate the forms of the Spaniards were seen dousing our bodies with pails of cold water brought from the river. Such

a drenching none could resist. Cursing we soon were on our feet, and our scattered senses coming back, all obeyed the orders to man the canoes for the journey down to the coast.

Grumbling and blear-eyed, the men who were to go made themselves ready, none too gently forced on by the Spaniards. Soon a wailing chant of droning voices filled the air. Some of the women roused themselves and stupidly looked on, then fell back, again sleeping. Little heralded the boats and canoes were pushed out from their landings. For a time the men worked, and then idly lolling at their places, the flotilla of canoes faded away down the river, bearing with them the results of our labours for weeks in the woods. What had the Indians received for it all? We were still in debt, as before, and when the traders came back up the river all must go again to the woods.

So it would be for them always, but now José and I were alone, our chance had come, could we gain our freedom? José would do whatever I asked, that I knew. If I did nothing he would simply sit down and wait, enjoying the chance for a rest, and when the *patrón* ordered would go again to the woods to gather rubber.

CHAPTER X

THE COMPACT WITH THE PRIEST

I **FELT** the tremendous importance of the next few weeks. There was no time to waste, yet I must see the priest. So, tarrying in the village, I waited. The days came and went. Again and again I explained my plan to José, — but we must wait for the priest; would he never come? Perhaps meeting the flotilla of rubber-canoes, he had collected his tribute and gone back to the coast, — a thought that troubled me, and my mind grew anxious.

Not long after, I saw that my fears had no grounds, for down the river appeared the well-known canoe paddled by a man and two Indian women. Padre Tomás was there seated at such ease as the canoe would afford. Women usually worked for him and his uncouth attendant, because he would not pay for such service, contending that all should serve the Church, and that he, her representative, need not pay. Why should he? His blessings were sought, and his curses were feared. The women gave more heed than the men and were more influenced by the Church, so it was they who served while the men stood aloof.

Word had gone from one to the other that our priest was coming. Women and children gathered at the

landing, and now I joined them. Curious looks were directed toward me. Why had I come, once the bad boy of the village, now the young man who had broken faith with José, my captain, and prevented his gathering rubber? Well enough that they thought it my sins which were troubling me, for José and I had kept up the appearance of bitter contention.

Now the canoe was drawing near, the women working with much effort and making poor progress, the attendant giving but little help. Presently they were within easy hail and salutations were called out, expressing our happiness at the priest's coming. Soon the canoe was made fast at the landing, and its occupants came climbing out one after the other. Padre Tomás, fat of stomach, and not overheavy of limb, shuffled out and, gasping for breath, stood among us.

"Greetings and salutations, my people. Blessings I bring you," he said.

"At how much each one?" yelled a mischievous boy, who immediately disappeared among the houses before Padre Tomás could see who had questioned his motive. The fat priest looked displeased, and then taking little further notice, made laborious effort up the steep bank to the village, going directly to the building which served for both chapel and mission house. Here, after he had eaten and rested, he sat receiving visitors, most of them women, though some boys went from curiosity to tarry with him a little.

I was anxious enough to make him a visit, but bided my time, waiting till vespers had been sung, and what frightful singing it was! But it was something different in the routine of our lives, so the women and

children all went and the men who had remained in the village stood at the door. When it was over and the people had gone home, I went to see the priest. I found him in his hammock, taking his ease; in fact, he was resting most of the time. Looking up he listlessly acknowledged my presence, but he became more interested when I handed him a quill feather half-full of gold dust, and then produced a good-sized bundle of rubber.

"Son, you are a good friend to the Church. Would that all might so well remember their duty. Have you come to confess?"

I had not thought of this, but answered him yes, at which he immediately rose from his hammock, now all curiosity himself. What great sin could I have committed that I should thus come to him? Seating himself by a table after closing the doors carefully, he put a little screen before his face, that I might not see him distinctly, and so be less embarrassed.

My confessions were easily made and readily forgiven. The drunken orgy of the *misilech* he noted, and gravely reprimanded excesses. My woman, to whom I was not married? It really was nothing, — "the little sin of the flesh." All these were easily forgiven, and for penance nothing more than a careful attendance at mass in the morning; and further, as evidence of self-denial, such contributions as I might be willing or able to give. Then pushing aside the screen, Padre Tomás beamed on me a satisfied unctuous expression. Now was my opportunity.

"Padre," I said, "I want to do more than that. Here in the woods one cannot know how much the

true Holy Church can guide and teach one. Padre, take me with you and teach me. I can serve the Church well."

"Nay, not so, my son, that cannot be."

"But see, padre, see how strong I am," and I showed him an arm of which any man might be proud. "I can work for and serve the Church well."

"Ah, son, but you little know the great cost to the Church. See this gold-dust you gave me. I will take some for my needs, only a little. Our superior he will take some for his needs; the most he will give to the bishop, who will keep some. What is left will be sent to Rome, for to Rome one never can send enough gold. No, son, it cannot be. You could not serve me, and the Church has need of good sons here in the woods."

"But, padre, I could pay rubber. Keep me a year and I will give you a whole canoe-load of rubber."

"But when would you give it?" and a sly twinkle came in the good padre's eye.

"In advance before you go," I said, boldly. "The largest canoe that we have."

"But can you get so much?" he asked, as if doubting.

"Give me the passing of one moon and a little more," I said, "and the rubber is here."

"Well, yes, the Church has schools and we have priests who teach. A big canoe-load of rubber? In five weeks did you say?"

"Yes! Yes!" in all eagerness I replied.

"But how can I wait so long on the word of a boy?" he said, almost petulantly.

"But if José the captain says it shall be?"

"Oh, then of course, if José the captain wishes to

put you to school, that is different. But you know I must get the rubber before Don Ignacio returns, or else he will claim it on José's debts. You see I know the conditions."

Without waiting to hear more I went hurrying to José's house, and with eager breath whispered in his ear, "He will! We can have all that I hoped."

José looked grave. "I am not sure of the plan. Priests are all alike. Take care when you trust them."

Soon we were on our way to the mission. I said nothing. José was admitting himself to my plan; why should I talk? But as we came to the house, José drew back reluctant and said again, "Something tells me we do not well. Together we could work and live as all Indians live. Why should we go after strange ways?"

"To be free," I replied, and linking my arm in his persuasively, urged him on.

"Ah, you have come," said the priest, his fat face beaming with expectant smiles.

"Yes, we have come" said José.

"And you want to send your boy to school? God is certainly moving the hearts of the Indians."

"You promise to teach him? How long will it be?"

"Two years at least," Padre Tomás replied.

"So long a time, to study all that time!" and José looked dismayed.

"Leave that all to me," Padre Tomás said, rubbing his sides with his hands and caressing his big fat stomach. "Now the terms, a canoe-load of rubber each year, — the big canoe?" and an anxious quaver filled the fat padre's voice.

"The terms are easy," José replied.

"Then we are agreed," and the padre rose to give us his blessing, and bade us go and gather the rubber.

"In the passing of a moon and a little more, we will return," said José, and the priest bowed his assent.

Then I knew the compact was made. Great was my exultation, and kneeling I asked Padre Tomás to make the sign of the cross over me, and to bless our engagements.

"Ah, beautiful boy," he said, while his hand enthusiastically made the form of the cross over my head, "we have won a son for the Church this day. Now go, and my blessing go with you."

We went away, and as we went José said, "Swear to me on the oath of an Indian, by the dead that they may arise as ghosts to torment you, that you will always keep faith with me."

"I swear it," I said, "except I serve you by what I learn, and should I break faith with you, may the great evil spirit curse my path always, may the ghosts rise up to torment, and may I never hide myself from their troubling. It is an oath, I swear it, the oath of a man."

Then in silence we walked to José's house. There our women met us, and when we ordered them to make ready our *toldas*, because we would go to the woods in the morning, there were loud complaints that we should thus leave them. Were they not beautiful, were they not ever ready to serve us? My woman gathered her arms close over my body and pressed herself to me, her hot breath coming quick and fanning my cheeks, yet when ambition, once holds a man, it rules all. Roughly I thrust the young woman from me and there

were no further words, but with ready hands and deft fingers the women worked, mending our *toldas* and making all ready for us.

With the grey light of dawn our women took all the things we would need in the woods to the canoe, and before any were ready to watch and cheer for our journey, we silently made our way up the river. The poles we were using struck against the sides of the canoe with a half-musical sound, disturbing the damp silence of morning, the time before sunrise, when only dim light fills the air.

Now we were beyond the sight of the village. Our work had begun. Stronger the light became. For an instant the violet, purple and grey on the river blended with the crimson and gold in the east, then the sun appeared, and sky and water glowed together in radiance. A million perfumes from thrice millions of flowers, and the endless songs of innumerable birds, life in the air which made the blood tingle to breathe it, — this was a tropical morning, the welcome of untrammelled freedom, auguring well for my work and ambitions.

Now there was no need of secrecy in our movements. We would go to our camp on the branch, stopping to sleep two nights on the way, and would arrive there late in the morning in time to cook breakfast and make ourselves comfortable.

On our arrival we went to the trees I had found, which were easy to locate, the little brook coming into the branch plainly showing the way. As a precaution we hid our canoe, drawing it well up in the woods, and then walking up the stream found the rocky precipice

just as I had found it. José doubted but followed, and on reaching the terrace stopped amazed at the sight. Truly the rubber-trees I had brought him were more than all those he had shown me. We set to work, cutting and hacking at many great trees for the stores we would accumulate for the *patrons* must last full two years, besides we must supply as well the canoe-loads for Padre Tomás. All that day we worked, taking no time for rest, and when night came we went back to the branch where we made our camp.

At sunrise we went at once to our rubber-trees, delighted to see how goodly a store of fine rubber had been accumulating during the night. All that day we worked as before, and so for a week we continued.

Then we rested, and after that went down the branch to prepare the places where we would store our rubber safely in hiding; for had we taken it all to our village the traders would have gotten it on some pretext or other. The law is a strange power, and we Indians had learned that it was not good to have more than enough for our needs. Our plan was to place a full canoe-load at different points where José could, from time to time, take his crew as occasion required, and let them hunt rubber. After a day or two he would make his mysterious excursion alone, going to the woods for a time, and coming back tell them he had found rubber, and had it safe in the woods ready for them to bring. Thus our secret would be safely hidden.

For another week we worked and prepared places for twenty canoe-loads of rubber. These hiding-places were made by laying dried sticks on the ground sometimes at the foot of a great tree where immense

protruding roots promised protection, while sometimes a sloping rock formed a good base for our work, and at others a pile of stones served for the foundation. It was hard work, and when each place was finished, marks had to be made by which José could be sure to find them again, but which would not serve as a guide for others who might come that way. These marks we made always on the side of the river opposite from the place where the rubber was to be hidden. We cut down a tree, and on two trees behind it made marks so that the three taken together would make a line directly toward the place across the river where the rubber would be. Who on seeing the trees would think that the place to which they pointed was over the river and not into the woods?

Nearly half our time had now gone and the heavy work was to come. With all haste we went back to the rubber-grove, and were more than delighted with the great accumulations we found waiting for us. Working with all our strength, we took out canoe-load after canoe-load of rubber, great rounded masses from the hollows made at the foot of the trees, and bundles of scrap from their sides where the milk had trickled and formed, as it were, long ribbons of rubber. Finally each hiding-place had been filled and protected with a thatch of palm leaves laid over it, and still in the grove there was more than we could carry away, so two more hiding-places were made, and filled to overflowing. Then we went back again, loaded our canoe for the last time, and made our way down the river, seeking our village, some few days ahead of the date when Padre Tomás would expect us.

Success had been with us; the weather all we could ask. It was the first approach of the dry season, when gentle showers would be expected as night came on, but the days were always fine and clear, and the sky was one continued vault of blue with a few fleecy clouds to relieve its intense gleaming, with the promise of cooling refreshment at night. All this we had seen many times, and now took no heed at all. We knew that the air had grown dry, but as yet no dust had arisen, and we knew that the sun would grow hot and make travelling more than unpleasant; so we urged our way on down the river, planning to get as far as we could for our morning's work. After resting through the noontime, we would arrive at our village at night, hide the canoe and its load of rubber in the reeds near the landing, and then let Padre Tomás know that we had been successful, and that I would go with him whenever he might give the word.

No adventures had befallen us, and none came to us now. We rested at noontime, and with the cool of the day went on down the river; not urging our speed, but lazily floating, we made such way as the current permitted. Evening came, and then the night, and a cool breath rose up from the forests, which could not come in the day, for the sunshine smothered it back. With the cool breath of the woodlands gently tracing its influence over our bodies, we felt stimulated to work, and now drove our canoe forward. When the night had grown late, dark objects suddenly loomed up on one side of the river, — our village, still and tranquil in sleep. To hide our canoe below the landing, where the reeds grew thick, was short work; then

wading ashore through the mud, we went quietly to José's house. Now and again a dog ran out to bark at us on our way, but on finding who it was went by, turned sneaking back as if ashamed. Presently we came to the house, pushed aside the door, and taking the first convenient hammocks, were soon hard asleep.

CHAPTER XI

MY OATH

EARLY next morning we were awakened by the outcries of our astonished women, and while still half asleep I fancied I heard some one sneaking out of our house, but it mattered little to us as long as our women avoided strangers not of our blood. Hastily they prepared and we ate of some roasted plantain with toasted meat, and drank large draughts of black coffee. Then I was ready to go and see Padre Tomás, who I was told still lingered here in our village, though with growing impatience to be on his way.

Without delaying further, I went to his house, but the priest was still sleeping, and there was nothing to do but to wait, which I did with impatience, each moment long drawn out, seeming a burden greater than the moment preceding. At last I heard a harsh voice scolding the servant, and after much contention the priest was apparently prepared for the day. The door opened, and the attendant went hurrying out to "see if those Indians had returned," for so I had heard Padre Tomás command him. The search was not long, for confronting him I said, "We have come. Take me to your master."

"And have you brought the rubber?" the servant asked.

"To you, no; for your master, perhaps. Take me to him." An angry scowl from the servant, and I knew I had made an enemy, but what Indian ever gave heed to the number of enemies? and I repeated my words, "Take me to your master."

Smiling now, he acquiesced, but conducting me, whispered, with threatening expression, "You will not be so proud by and by. I have powers. We will see later on. Here is Padre Tomás, and a long time you have kept him waiting." Then addressing the priest, "Reverend Father, the Indians have come. I have brought them."

"Ever faithful Pablo, but for you who knows how they might have been drinking and blaspheming again?"

"What a liar!" I said to myself; then, kneeling, asked for the priest's blessing.

"And have you brought me the rubber?" the priest asked as he blessed me.

"Yes, padre, full and more than we said."

"And what now delays us?" he asked. "When will you go?"

"To-day, if you wish. Why should I care to tarry?"

"And we will not tarry! Of the village I am tired enough, and Pablo is tired of all. Go make everything ready. We will start in the cool of the day when the evening is coming."

There was not much ceremony in all this. Padre Tomás remained comfortably seated, his fat face now bearing an expression of deep satisfaction as he ordered

Pablo to bring him his breakfast. I did not wait to hear more, but bowing before him, made my way out of the house and hurried to find José. Conflicting emotions surged up from my heart. Indians may be reserved, but they all have feelings, deep feelings that strangers may rarely see. I was going away, all the life of the village would be left far behind me; I would be different, all was to change. Was I sorry or glad, was the future for good or for evil?

Now I had come to José, sitting before his house. Here I found him resting as tired men rest, when the burden of the work, which though accomplished, still bears down on them. What a fine sight he was, broad-faced, keen-eyed, strong of limb, his great arms hanging idly now as he rested.

"Well, son," he said, and José was to me more than a father, "what says the priest?"

"He goes when the day becomes cool, and bids us make ready."

"So soon?" and José looked at me in silence, but I knew his thoughts. Would this boy be true to him? Would the priest be true to the boy? Was it well he should go? Who might know the future at all? Then he said to me, "Joaquín, true I have found you, and true I believe you will be. By your labour you have secured rubber to go and learn what you will. By your labour I shall have rest for a time. So far it is well. Your blood is not our blood. It is only we Indians who ever have enough and with that are contented, if our masters work us not too hard or too long. With you it is different. I see you must struggle to have more than enough; something forebodes in me evil,

yet I will not try to foretell the future. May your way be ever successful, may you achieve all you desire."

There in the morning sunshine I sat at his feet, leaning my head against his knees, saying nothing at all, only pressing myself closer against him, waiting to hear and remember all that he said. For a time neither spoke; then I rose up and standing before him, said, "José, my tribal father, I scarcely know what I do, but contentment I cannot have as you know it, nor can I in debt serve any master; but, whatever I suffer I will never falter, whatever I win, to you will I owe it all, and to you I will ever be faithful, your commands I will obey; you shall rest and not be any man's debt-bounden servant."

And José answering said, "I remember your words and I trust you, though your way is with strangers. But remember this well, take heed and give no man your confidence, for these strangers will all be against you, the same as they are all against one another. Trust no man, keep counsel with yourself only."

And answering I promised him this.

Then José called the women, and told them I would go on a very long journey. His women were little concerned. My mother, now well provided in José's family, made feeble protest. After all, why should I not do as I would? But my woman, protesting with violence, made bitter complaints that I should be so unfaithful. I told her that young men enough in the village would have her to woman, and that José would see her established and care for her till that time should come. With this she became more contented, though

I saw she really was sorrowing that I should leave her, and my heart was touched.

Then she reminded me of the time now approaching when she hoped to bring me a son, but of this I gave little heed, for the duty to children belongs with the women. I did not send her home to her mother; José would take care of her. Surely that was doing enough.

Time was passing and much was to be done. Word went out that I was going with Padre Tomás, and with that all the people came to José's house. What an excitement there was, and through it all every one curious and still more curious to know why I went and what was the occasion that took me away. All these questions were merely answered with,—I went because I wanted to go, and Padre Tomás was willing to take me.

If the good-will of the Indians could bring it to me, fortune would be mine, and truly I would not want on the journey, for every one brought me some present, and each vied with the other in doing services for me. Even our late rivals, the Indians I had made sick with poison, for some had remained in the village, brought presents to me, wishing good fortune would follow my path. I was moved with kind feelings, made strong by their friendly actions, yet if the occasion should ever come I would use poison on them again, as they would use it on me. But now I was going away for longer than any had gone from our village, and our hearts were warmed to each other.

The afternoon had come, Padre Tomás would soon be ready, and José went with me to bring up the canoe-load of rubber and transfer it to the priest's boat. His

canoe would not hold it by half, so we hastily made a raft on which the pile of rubber could be firmly lashed and taken safely down the river. The people helped in the work, and when it was done many comments there were as to where we might have found such a supply. "José's rubber-mine," people called it, where could it be? José only smiled at their wonderings and made answer, "A rubber-mine truly I have, but my head carries it. Rubber there is in all the woods, everywhere it is plenty, only you do not know how to find it."

Presently all was ready. The small outfit I carried and the people's gifts of provisions were placed in the padre's canoe. The raft we would tow behind us on a very long rope made of bark fibre, forming a cable so that the raft might follow easily and have room not to molest the canoe by too close a contact.

Our starting was not without ceremony. Padre Tomás spoke to the people for a few moments, bidding them mend their ways lest the devil should get them, and urging that they should heed my example and give to the Church, seek its counsels, and follow in wisdom's path where the priests might instruct them. Raising his hands, he blessed all the people, to which they gave little heed, most of them not even stopping their noisy talking. Finally he called Pablo, and motioning that I should follow, he went down to the canoe, his impatient step telling of his displeasure at the little attention the people gave him.

For a moment José and I gripped each other's hands, then I followed after the priest and made ready to guide the canoe and our raft into the river. A great

shouting and noise rose up from the people as we pushed off, guns were fired, women shrieked their *adiós*, men shouted and cheered, boards were clapped together, drums were beaten, and reed pipes sent up their wailing music. Surely the spirits of evil which all of us feared could not withstand such an onslaught of noise; all must have been frightened so far away that none would ever find out where we had gone, and the stranger evil spirits which we might meet would not know us and most probably would give no heed to us at all.

Floating heavily out in the river, dragging the raft-load of rubber, our canoe went silently, then gathering momentum, started on its way down-stream with the current, while the shouting and noise were redoubled. As we floated on, the cries of the people grew fainter, the sounding noises fell less sharp on our ears. A bend came in the river, a moment the canoe seemed to hang on its way; looking back I saw all the people standing, their voices now grown silent as they watched the canoe about to disappear from their sight. All the houses stood out in sharp outline, all the places and the friends I had always known for so long were clearly before me; then the village passed out of sight at the bend in the river.

Before me a long stretch of rolling water led out to the future. A depression came over my spirit; how desolate it all appeared, — the swelling current, dense jungled banks of the river, dead logs, and snags here and there in the water. Motionless, scarcely even thinking, I sat and did nothing, but for only a moment. Determination followed depression, and grasping my paddle I guided the canoe on its way with strong, even

strokes, determined and feeling well able to conquer. Impatient and burning to enter the great world now opening before me, I laid my strength to the work and forced our canoe onward.

Good progress we made, for the current was with us, and when sunset came I arranged our camp by the side of the river. Most of the work I had to do, for Pablo was of little use, and the women were no longer with the priest. Padre Tomás helped not at all; in fact, all he did was to sit in the boat and mumble his prayers, as if that were any use when one was out in the woods. But I made a good camp and Pablo cooked a good dinner; I will say that for him, he was a good cook. Together we served Padre Tomás while he sat complacently on a log, his hands at times folded over his fat stomach. I wondered why priests got such fat stomachs, other men didn't; but that was little concern, — what Pablo and I had to do was to fill up that stomach, and it took a deal of provisions. However, we were fortunate in having more than enough, and after a time we got more than enough in Padre Tomás, who, when he had eaten all that he could, got up, yawned heavily, and waddled up to the camp, got under his *tolda*, and prepared for the night.

It was evening, the tropical night was closing about us; soft influences, poetic fancies filling the air, disturbed, however, all on a sudden, by our priest's voluminous snoring, puffings, and snortings. The good man was asleep, but his rest did not seem peaceful. Pablo and I were eating and over our feast were beginning to feel some friendly influences, while with wondering eyes I listened to his accounts of the great

things at the places where we were going. While we were talking some belated turkeys came flying heavily with beating wings to roost in the trees near our camp. Here was an opportunity, and taking a gun I fortunately killed a fine bird, while the others with frightened cries went rapidly flying away in the gathering dark. A heavier snort from the priest's *tolda* told us that Padre Tomás had slept on all undisturbed. We cleaned the turkey, prepared it for cooking by rolling it carefully in leaves, plastered the leaves over with mud, put it to roast in the fire, and on the morrow a feast would be ready.

The mosquitoes gathering about us, we sought our *toldas*, where Pablo was soon asleep, and his snorings, added to those of the priest, made hideous discord. For the first time in my life sleep did not come to me. Perhaps the excitement of the day which had passed brought lively fancies to keep my brain active, perhaps it was only the vigorous snoring sounds to which I was not accustomed. At any rate I could not sleep, and lying awake I found myself giving way to fancies, imagining that the time had come when I had learned from the Church, and was now her good servant with the titles to all our rubber-groves, safely secured, so that none could touch them. I fancied that José, contented, free from debt, and resting whenever he would, was with me, and Don Ignacio and Don Jamie were both there, but their influence had gone out of our lives, no more did we fear them. Oh, it was a beautiful fancy, so lovely that even the snoring seemed almost like music; and then I slept, and in sleep my thoughts were continued as dreams. I was at peace with the world.

Morning came, Padre Tomás was still sleeping, so was Pablo; little consequence to me, let them sleep. My first care was the cargo of rubber. Safe and undisturbed I found it; next I saw that the turkey was cooked. Then throwing aside my breech-cloth, I plunged into the water and enjoyed a vigorous bath in the cool, swift-running current. After that I made coffee ready, a generous supply because we had plenty, and sat watching the sunrise, waiting for my sleeping companions. Waiting is not pleasant work. Morning was growing apace and with it my impatience, till with a sudden resolve I went to Pablo's *tolda*, cautiously thrust a wet canoe paddle under it, and feeling about sought Pablo's leg, and finding it, rubbed and jabbed none too gently.

Pablo stirred in his sleep, then starting up with sudden energy, gave a series of wild shrieks for help, and in his fear and haste to get out from his *tolda* became entangled in its folds. Still shrieking, he called on Padre Tomás for help, shouting, "Snakes, alligators, they are on me, we are attacked! Oh, we are attacked! Help! Help! they are at me!" A snorting came from the padre's *tolda* as, puffing with fear, he began to crawl from under his protecting cover, and Pablo, too, was getting himself disentangled. Taking suggestions from Pablo's cries, I rushed to the river, beating the water with my paddle and making a great disturbance. Then I called out, "Now they are gone," and looking back a sight not easily forgotten met my eyes. Clapsed in each other's arms, dishevelled and scantily clothed, were the padre and servant, abject terror distorting their faces, their flabby limbs trem-

bling, and Padre Tomás's great stomach undulating in fear of what might be coming.

"No danger now," I cried, "they are gone."

"Thank God for his mercy," gasped Pablo.

"Amen," responded the priest.

"What a fearful attack!" shuddered Pablo, "See the red marks on my leg where the teeth caught me."

"How brave and how valiant!" the priest exclaimed. "Surely we are among the Church's heroes who carry her missions into wild, terrible places. Your daring shall be recommended, good Pablo; the bishop shall hear of it all. How bravely we drove off the saurians which came to attack us! There must have been many, perhaps twenty at least. See all about the camp how the sand is disturbed!" And in their excitement Padre Tomás and Pablo, forgetting their scanty attire, went around the camp pointing out to each other what they thought tracks of wild animals.

A sudden realization seemed to fill the priest's mind. He looked at his naked legs and beat a hasty retreat to his *tolda*. Pablo also, taking the hint, sought seclusion. I kept seriously grave, and set out the food for our breakfast. It was a goodly supply, my turkey, the principal dish, in the centre, still wrapped in its mantle of mud.

Soon the padre came out, his fat face flushed with excitement, and after him Pablo, looking as though all the world thought him a hero; and I, the Indian youth cause of it all, stood waiting to serve their breakfasts. A rough table had been made under a tree by the river, where the priest sat down, and folding his hands over his stomach, returned thanks for the pro-

visions vouchsafed and for the Providence which had brought them safely through such great danger.

Then motioning to Pablo, he said, "Brave companion, sit with me at breakfast, an honour to you, and a saving of time, for who knows those hungry beasts might return and attack us again; and the Indian boy, he too was brave, though not so daring as we were ourselves. Sit with us, Joaquín, that time may not be lost. I would reach houses and safety to-night, for it is not well to expose oneself without cause to these dangers."

So we three sat and had breakfast. The turkey, a great massive bird, was cooked to perfection; the coffee was strong from long boiling, the way we all loved to have it; the provisions our friends had supplied were abundant, and we ate. Padre Tomás praised the food and did it more than justice. When nothing remained, and we were fortified for the work of the day, the priest regretted that there neither was time nor reasonable safety for a brief resting in peaceful sleep after such a fine breakfast. Ordering me to prepare the canoe, we were soon on our way, making such haste as we could to reach, ere the night-time should take us, a group of houses some distance down the river.

The day passed without incident, Padre Tomás, an umbrella spread to protect his face from the sun, dozing in the broad centre part of the canoe. Pablo, at the stern, did little work, as befitted a hero, and the burden of all that long day fell on me. At times the padre awoke from his dozing and urged me to hasten our way, but I needed no urging. My hopes were before, not behind, the canoe, and who having strength in

his arms and blood in his veins will not follow his hopes? The hours of the day went past as I steadily worked at my paddling. Going down-stream we usually let the boats drift, but now, urged by my strength, our canoe made good progress, so that, when the cool of the day came, some houses were seen by the river, at which Pablo called out in delight, and Padre Tomás, crossing himself, returned thanks that our dangers were over.

CHAPTER XII

OPEN WATERS

HERE we were to stop. The canoe and the raft were made fast to the shore, and our first care was to carry the cargo of rubber a piece at a time to the house where we would stop for the night. We were with Christians now, at least, these people called themselves Christians, and we would have to be careful. A low type of men they were, mingled negro, Indian, and outcast Spanish blood; villainous fellows I thought, and I noticed that Pablo was not unlike them. There was a little thatched chapel of rough construction, and that night Padre Tomás sang vespers, Pablo assisting. I did not then understand the service, and did not suppose they were singing, but in my untutored mind thought that the noises they made were to frighten the devil, and to scare away evil spirits which might be about us, and, deeply impressed, I attended reverently. At this Padre Tomás was pleased, and when it was over told me that mass would be sung in the morning and bade me be there.

Then I took my gun and went hunting, for I wished to be alone in the woods. My spirit was heavy, and my heart in its loneliness sought solitude rather than contact with those who were no companions. Here in the lowlands where we had come, the country was

different, the lands were not good. The jungles were dense, and only in the higher trees of the forest, where the sunshine reached them, were there green leaves. Lower down around me there were grey trunks, pallid stems, and everywhere accumulations of dead vegetation, among which tender ferns and tropical plants grew in abundance. They were desolate surroundings, like my own lonely feelings. The dead past of the scenes of my boyhood which I was leaving behind me were, I fancied, like the faded leaves and fallen branches; but all among them grew soft, tender plants of the shade, and I likened them to my own budding hopes for the future.

Scarcely making a sound, I took my way slowly onward, forgetting to look out for game, contented at being alone in the woods with my thoughts. Evening was gathering, and then recalling that the padre loved wild pigeons, I sought out a roost, and with two or three shots had a good supply, so close were they sitting together preparing to sleep for the night. Poor things, they always came back after circling away in alarm, and one could have killed more than enough, but I had a full burden and needed no more. Retracing my steps to the houses, I received Padre Tomás's praise for my thoughtful hunting. I set immediately to work preparing the birds, cleaning them and wrapping each one in fresh leaves, and plastering them over with mud as I had done with the turkey, excepting that now besides salt, I added peppers, onions, and savoury spices. Building a fire, I put the birds in their mud cases to roast in the coals.

After this I sat at my ease, and listened in awe at the

stories which Padre Tomás and Pablo were telling of their rude encounters with fierce alligators and snakes, and how they, only clad in their night-clothes, so valiantly repelled the attacks, fighting with knives. I could have laughed out loud, but was too cautious for that, and when they called me to witness, I assented to all they had said, and added some lies of my own in regard to the size and strength of the beasts, which they seemed to think, or wished others to believe, had attacked them. Finally the night growing damp, and the mosquitoes swarming out in great numbers, we all sought the houses, and hanging our *toldas*, were soon asleep, and at rest from the alarms and fatigues of the day.

Next morning Padre Tomás celebrated the mass with ceremony such as I never had seen, for he gave little care to that in our village. But we were heathens, as I afterwards learned, and he went to us to teach and collect our tribute, for all must aid in supporting the Church. After mass my pigeons were served, and Padre Tomás was loud in his praises. Such a cook, he said, would be a good son to the Church. When he had eaten all that he could, Pablo and I were served, and had enough, for priests live well, and those who travel with them are never in want.

We went on again, six days' journey it was, and after that a rough day of work for Pablo and me, but mostly for me, packing our effects and rubber to a stream, the waters of which were near our river and which would lead us to another river flowing out to the coast near the city of Cartagena. Each night we slept at rough houses, not so cleanly or so well made as those

owned by the Indians; and the people we met were mostly negroes, who, for all I could see, simply lived and did nothing. Few people there were, but we always timed our work so as to reach their houses at sundown.

After a time we came to a considerable number of houses nearer the coast, and stopped for a few days. Padre Tomás was busy at numerous affairs, and we were indeed glad to have a rest. Early one morning I was told to prepare the canoe without any delay, because we would start on immediately, the padre hoping that night to reach some houses further down, where the river lost itself among the lagoons and islands along the coast. Some people were wanting to go down the river, so our canoe, a large one, was well filled, and there were men enough with their paddles to take us all and our rubber in safety. Padre Tomás was in good spirits, I had never seen him so happy, and as we made our way down the river he talked to me long about the beauties of the Church, its services to all the people, and told me many things which to my mind were strange; but I listened and questioned not what he said, for had I not come to learn?

Now midday had come, and the sun was blightingly hot, but Padre Tomás, comfortable under his shade umbrella, urged us to force our way on, and the men who were with us whispered one to another and then on to me that it was best to continue, for a night near the lagoons was not good, and unless we pushed on we might find it unpleasant when evening was gathering. So we all worked together, the canoe making good progress, and the padre praised us as excellent men, worthy sons of the Church.

The country began to change, green savannas opened out from the river where tall grass grew in abundance, then for a time jungles would line the banks, again savannas would appear, all the while the trees becoming lower and weaker, and the grasses and reeds more vigorous and sturdy. The currents of the river grew sluggish, and we could see that the green savannas with all their luxuriant growth were wet and treacherous. Here and there clumps of bushes and groves of palmetto-trees were near the river, then came a broad expanse of waving grasses and reeds, and back of that the jungles. Great numbers of herons, white, grey, and brown, and blackbirds in flocks were flying about, while hovering over the grasses were myriads of butterflies in constant motion. It was a beautiful scene, intense under the deep blue burning sky of the dry season, and attractive to my eyes because it was all new and strange.

Now the river broadened out, the waters became quiet, and presently we were floating on a broad lagoon where the water was steely black with its reflections of blue, contrasting sharply against the green swampy savannas. Before us across the water was a line of white sand with dull green bushes growing in places, and from here came a distant sound, pausing, then threatening with alternate unison, a sound of ill-omen I thought, though I afterwards learned it was only the waves of the sea.

I would have liked to go in a canoe and look at the strange sight of open waters as broad as the land, for of these I had heard but always doubted, but I could not go now, and must be content with expectations,

for we would stop for the night at a group of rough, empty houses, placed there for the convenience of travellers who were constantly coming and going. That night, as the sun set, we were forced to retreat to our *toldas* by swarms, crowding on swarms, of mosquitoes, numbers such as I had never heard or imagined.

In the morning we hastily took to our canoe, urged by the torment of the pests, and with smarting bodies started on our way, nor tarried even to eat. When the sun rose higher, and the air grew hot, the mosquitoes would seek shelter, and we could stop for breakfast. We continued amid the low lagoons and swamps of the coast lands, stopping each night to sleep at the camps made for travellers. Early on the morning of the third day, we came out on a broad lagoon, which all the party hailed with delight. The swamps of the coast were behind us.

Far up the lagoon a group of red and white houses seemed floating above the dark water, hanging upon the blue sky, as it were. Thither we bent our course, and made fair progress, though for myself I was not working with great diligence, for never before had I been where the water and sky came together, and in awe I thought it must be the end of the world. But for the confidence displayed by the others I would have wished to turn back, and seek the safe, protecting woods which I had always known. Presently growing used to my surroundings, I worked again with a will, eagerly watching our course toward the houses which hung in the distance.

The way was indeed hard and long, but conditions were favourable to us, for no wind was blowing. The

men said, however, that later there would be wind in plenty, and we would have hard work, unless we got across the lagoon to the beach before the wind, coming in from the sea, should impede our progress. For awhile we held our way directly toward the distant houses, then turning sharply made for the beach, all of us, even Pablo, paddling now with a will, while Padre Tomás closed his sun-umbrella that we might make better progress. Well it was for us that we made every effort, and as a reward for our labours were drawing near to the white sand-bar which separated us from the sea; for as we went little gusts of wind floated over the water, and ripples danced in the sun as if gleeful in besetting us. Sturdy arms held our canoe on its way, we were nearing the sand-bar, the wind was increasing, but so far as we were concerned we would soon be safe from it, blow as it might. Now we were close to the sand-bar, and I saw what to me was indeed strange, white sand with stubby grass growing through it, with clumps of round-leaved scrub-growth at the more protected places, and then ridges of sand white and alone, nothing growing upon them. The outline of the sand-hills stood against the sky in sharp contrast; glistening white, the sand seemed to reflect the sunlight, and through the air came the ominous sound of the waves in long-drawn pulsations. Out on the lagoon the winds had churned the water to sharp running waves, white-capped with foam; the wind growing stronger began to disturb the sand on the ridges and blow up little clouds and fan-tails of dust which rose and then disappeared.

We rested for a brief space only, and with the fresh-

ness of the sea in our faces, breathing deep into our lungs its soft, salty odours, while the sweeping winds blew cool over our half-naked bodies, we took up our way again, paddling on in undisturbed water. The sand-bar gave us ample protection, though a little way out in the lagoon we could not have made any progress, so fiercely the wind, though coming out of an unclouded sky, was blowing over the waters.

The way was long because we had to keep close to the shore and follow its bendings, but before us there was no impediment. The air was more than invigorating, so we bent to our work with a will, and all the time the houses which hung in the distance seemed to grow nearer, first rising up out of the water, and then seemingly drawing toward us, till at last when the day was near to its close we reached a point where the advancing motion of our canoe plainly told us we were closely approaching the city, and in a little time more we were making a landing at the beach outside the city of Cartagena.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SCHOOL OF ST. JOSEPH

I HAD never seen such a place as this, nor had I ever met so many people, boys, girls, men, and women. Every one seemed to know Padre Tomás, who had now changed all his manner. His severity was gone as he scrambled out of the canoe, beaming and smiling and giving his blessing to all who were near him. Other priests came hurrying with greetings, and then fell to taking account of the rubber, and when this was done and it had been delivered into safe-keeping we went together within the walls of the city to the monastery, where for some time I was to live, and studying grow wise in the ways of the world.

Here I found a whitewashed building of two floors, a forbidding exterior, a red-tiled roof, and a heavy arched entrance with great massive doors protected by iron bindings. In one of these great portals a smaller door had been cut, and through this we now entered. I found myself in a large courtyard, a tumbled-down fountain occupying the centre, and arched corridors one on each floor stretching around the sides, with a wide interval at one end where were heavy doors which I afterward learned was the entrance to the church. The gate was locked behind us and I was

a prisoner, an intern in the monastery, under control of the priests for a year. As we crossed the court I saw I would not lack young companions. There were plenty of boys, though they were not like the boys in our village, they seemed to lack the vitality of life and were scarcely like boys at all. Those we encountered gravely bowed to the padre, and some knelt for his blessing, which he freely gave, but not with good humour, for again his expression had changed and his face had become contemptuously flabby, as I had always known it when he had come to our village.

We went to a richly furnished room, where there was a man, a priest, like Padre Tomás, with other priests gathered about him. Padre Tomás's face became complacently humble, and, wonder of wonders to me, he who always exacted tribute from us, knelt down before this other priest and asked for his blessing. Then rising, he stood before him and gave an account of his journey, of the fine store of rubber he had brought, how I, a wild Indian, hearing his counsels and teachings, had at last been moved by religious fervour and had sought the Church as a dutiful son craving instruction; and to this the elder priest said, "Well done, Tomás, well done." Then I was brought, and kneeling before him, saw in this older priest a man whom I might respect, yes, even love as I loved José. Briefly I told my wishes, nor contradicted the claims of Padre Tomás that he had moved my religious feelings. I said I had contributed the cargo of rubber as reported, and that another year a second cargo would come, equal to the first, and the elder priest said, "It is well; your earthly father has sent us enough to pay, and pay liberally,

for your instruction." Then craving his blessing, for somehow my feelings prompted me that I might have confidence in this man, though with my whole heart I began to fear and distrust Padre Tomás, I was told to retire; and as I went I heard the padre eagerly begin the story of how the wild alligators had attacked him by the river.

But the elder priest cut him short, saying, "To-night we will hear your story; now we are fully occupied till the evening."

I found the court and all the corridors were deserted, and an attendant dressed in a black gown came to me and said he would show me my room, where I must remain during the afternoon meditation till the bell of the church rang for vespers. My room was a bare-looking place at the end of one of the long upper corridors; a bed, a table, a chair, was all it contained; but a little window, heavily latticed, looked out over the sea and let in the wind still blowing up from it.

The attendant, bidding me close my door till the bell called me to vespers, turned and left me, and I was alone. My meditations were truly not very religious; rather they were speculations and wonderings as to what might be coming next, and longing thoughts turning back to José and the free life in our village.

Finally a great clanging of bells broke over the silence, doors were thrown open, and troops of boys and young men, all neatly dressed in black with white shirts and collars, formed a long line two and two in the courtyard. I only had my Indian clothes, cotton pantaloons, a half-shirt, half-coat, which did not cover all of my stomach, and a bark fibre breech-cloth over

my white pantaloons. I was fully dressed for an Indian when among strangers, though when we were alone we gave little heed as to whether or not we were clothed. In my hair I set a macaw's feather, long, red, and straight, which stood up and made a majestic appearance, and without more delay I went down and took my place at the end of the line. A low, mocking laugh from one boy to another greeted my appearance, and the boy nearest me set his heel on my bare toes, an act for which I determined he should later pay the full penalty.

Just then, a stern voice called us to order, and we marched around the court to the church, a dim and, to my mind, a beautiful place. The service well known all over the world began, and I stood looking on in wonder, but taking no part except when at the last the elder priest rose to give us and all the congregation his blessing. I knelt reverently down with the others, pained to see that most were impatient and inattentive. The line was formed again, and we all marched to our rooms, and once more I was left to myself.

After a time the attendant came and said that Padre Tomás would tell all the priests of the monastery of his adventures, and that I was to wait at their dinner with some of the other young men, for perhaps the priests would like to ask me about the padre and his work.

I was eager to go, but my clothes were an embarrassment to me, though the attendant said the bishop, as I now learned they called the elder priest, wished me to attend in my native dress, and I found that what the bishop said was law. Without further delay I went

with the attendant to a large room where a long table was being arranged. I thought it all most magnificently grand; truly it was compared to our houses, but I afterwards learned that it was plain and austere indeed. Soon the table was ready and word came from the kitchen that the dinner was cooked.

A bell sounded and presently groups of priests came, filling the room. Mostly their habits were black, but some were in brown, and I heard they were visitors, humble men who were not of the regular priests. No one sat, but all stood at the table waiting. I saw Padre Tomás, and he saw me too; our eyes met, and I seemed to understand he expected me to attest all he said. The padre might tell such tales as he would, my voice would vouch for them all, for was he not my sponsor there in the school, and did I not depend on him to carry my tidings back to our village, and bring me word of José? His story, too, although an untruth, would do no harm to any one. Yes, he might tell such things as he would, his witness was ready and willing.

Then the bishop, a venerable man, but still in the vigour of life, came into the room with a step that did not falter. Before him all bowed with respect, and the boys and younger men dropped on their knees as he invoked a blessing and took his seat at the table, while the others remained respectfully standing. Then with a pleasing gesture the bishop gave permission, and without more ceremony each priest took his seat.

The dinner was served at once, and how they did eat and keep us on the run in their service! But we got

something too, for the cooks were good-natured, and there was plenty and over for all in the room. The good bishop's face was all aglow with zeal and affection, so that we who were serving contended for the pleasure of bringing things to him, but he ate very little, yet always took of what we brought him with a kindly grace, rewarding our labours, though he passed the food on to the others.

The men sitting at the foot of the table in their brown, torn garments took scarcely anything for themselves, — bread, water, and cold meat was all, and not much of that. But it was the middle table, where Padre Tomás sat with the other fat priests, which was groaning beneath the load of provisions. Waiting my opportunity, I took from the kitchen a dish of meats, savoury with spices, rich oils and fine flavours. This was for the middle table, but humbly and somewhat afraid, I took it to the men in rough clothes, and kneeling beside a strong man, who seemed to be their leader, said, "Padre, there is enough and plenty and still more than enough. Take this and let me bring you other nice things."

A kind, happy light came in the eyes of the stranger, who shook his head and motioned me to rise, and not kneel beside him. "I am not worthy of all this, my son," he said, and a young man at his side, whose face bore traces of trouble and struggling, said, "A magnificent tempter! A beautiful youth, and as strong as a bull, coming to us with kindness and delicate foods; yet the goodness within him bringing temptation. Go, son, your kind act will ever be remembered; to us it is more than the food you are bearing."

The bishop, seeing what I had done, called me to him, and taking the dish laid an affectionate hand on my shoulder as I knelt beside him, saying, "Son, that was a good, kindly act, and my whole heart goes out to you. After a time you will learn that there are other and far better things than the goods of this world, and will reverence our friends for their treasures in heaven. Ay, Tomás," he said, addressing the priest, "your mission bears noble fruit, and now that all have eaten we would hear your story."

"Señoría and reverend father," the priest began, "you do my humble efforts great honour; unworthy I am, yet being unworthy I labour. Heavy the path is and burdensome for one of my years, yet the knowledge of the blessings of which I may be the humble bearer supports me.

"This youth can tell you of all that I say. Where his village stands on a bluff by the river there are many people, for all the time Indians are coming and going. There on my arrival all the town gathers to greet me, and at my going away an equal number come to wish me Godspeed. Ah, they are good people those Indians. The church is there well attended, even the men come to mass.

"But, oh, the saints and the Holy Virgin protect us, the perils of that terrible river! Long days in the sun burning fiercely upon us, hours of danger spent on the treacherous banks, scarcely a night passes without alarms from wild animals. Many tales of danger, fatigue, and exposures I might tell, yet fearing to weary your kindness and interest, one must suffice and serve as a type for them all. Only a few days now

past, we made our camp on a sand-bank, a place which this boy selected for us, and cleverly he fashioned a shelter, using great leaves to make us a roof; frail protection, indeed, but there we slept, good faithful Pablo and your humble priest returning from his mission. Tired indeed we were, and we slept sound, for the day's burdens had been heavy, — asleep in those wild, savage woods, but we feared not at all. Our trust was in God and the Virgin.

“At times I was awakened by a sense of danger, and fancied strange enemies prowling around us; then remembering in whose protection I had lain down, my eyelids closed again, and my spirit rested. Yet there was something strange in that camp, a crawling presence ever disturbing the night, and once a heavy breathing and a sickening smell, like putrid musk, greeted my nostrils. How helpless we were, what terrible danger might this be which was threatening! Cautiously raising one end of my *tolda* I peeped out, and my heart stood still almost as it might at a glimpse of the inferno.

“Glaring eyes, red and green, were upon me. Out of the darkness long heads with glistening white teeth were poking toward me, yet fearing to come any closer. Oh, terrible sight, fearful danger! A great troop of fierce alligators had come out of the river gathering to attack us.

“Hastily I covered myself beneath my protecting *tolda*, and waited. Moments of awful suspense they were, but commending my spirit to God, and holding the cross in my hand, I was calm while the creeping sounds on the sand telling the gradual approach of the

saurians became more distinct. Then cries of distress, frantic pleadings for help, rose from my good companion Pablo. 'Twas he who had suffered the first attack, and I, only I, the poor priest, was at hand to give aid; but my aid was effective. I well knew how animals hold fire in dread, so lighting a taper I thrust it in among the alligators, already one of them was half in Pablo's *tolda*. Fire saved us that time, and the frightened animals threw themselves back with violence, then retired in haste, but not far. A little distance from our camp, the fiercer and larger among those which attacked us stopped, and the others recovering their boldness drew back, and soon we were surrounded again by hungry alligators.

"I hastily divided my tapers with Pablo, and then we both sat and waited. At the first retreat of the alligators our brave young Indian friend made a dash for the jungles, where he could collect wood and dried leaves to make a great fire, a fire to save us and to save himself from a most fearful death. Now our problem was to defend ourselves with frail tapers till his help should come. Creeping, creeping, the sound on the sand made my blood run cold, one could not but tremble though one knew that the Virgin was watching and that God was our keeper. Creeping and crawling, creeping and crawling, the alligators were closing in on us again. Something began to nose about my *tolda*, a great ugly snout came pushing under its folds; that instant a taper was burning against it, and with a snort of pain the saurian threw itself back, nearly tearing my *tolda* down from its fastenings. Pablo and I each threw lighted tapers among those fierce, hungry

animals, and again they threw themselves back and retreated, but this time they did not go so far as at their first alarm, and soon they were crawling upon us again.

"It seemed that our time was at hand; the animals came now with greater force than before. Some we could burn with tapers, but we could not frighten them all. Now we saw and understood why they were coming so boldly. They could not but come, for out of the river had appeared a great multitude of the filthy creatures, and as they closed in those which were in front had no choice but to come, for they were pushed on to us, while those in the rear crowded forward with hungry ferocity, that they might be the first to take our blood. Oh, frightful death, at the jaws of such horrible creatures! Oh, the thought that our bodies should feed their vile bellies. The remaining tapers were grasped firmly in my right hand, and repeatedly making the sign of the cross, and commending Pablo to God, I prayed the Virgin to be near us now that it seemed we must die. I looked with horror on that dread company, crawling and contending and bearing down upon us, their ugly snouts boldly seen in the light of our tapers, their wicked eyes gleaming red and green as of hate, and their ugly gasping breaths threatening us death.

"They were close to us now, pausing as if for a great final dash. Hope left me, and a dread fascination and calm brought lassitude over my feelings; not fear, only a sickness to death. But just then our good Indian friend came dashing boldly out of the jungles. Fire-brands he had made of resinous palm sticks, and these

burning and crackling he cast in among the wild creeping beasts; but so intent were they on our poor bodies and their expectation to feast on us, that at first they gave no heed to the fire thrown among them. This lasted only an instant, and the next moment they all made a dash for the river; and that boy, following after them, actually laughed to see how they ran, and shouted too with delight as he cast his firebrands in among them. You may be sure that Pablo and I too joined in the chase, and soon not an alligator was anywhere near us, though out in the dark waters a momentary gleaming of eyes might be seen.

"We were safe. Pablo and I embraced each other and then our deliverer; and after that, when a goodly supply of palm fagots had been collected, we went back to our *toldas*, — but not to sleep; that were impossible after such an experience. We spent our time returning thanks to the Virgin and to all the Holy Saints who were near us during those hours of peril.

"See, Pablo is waiting to say what an experience of terror was ours."

"Ay," Pablo replied, "most terrible. Who could tell it as Padre Tomás has told it!"

"And Joaquín the Indian youth," Padre Tomás said, motioning to me, "he can say something of that most unearthly terror."

"Yes," I replied, dropping on one knee, because that little act seemed to bring me every one's favour, and I was there to seek favours. "Padre Tomás has told you wonderfully well. Danger there was, greater because I was so slow at finding the firebrands, but the night was dark; I could not easily find them."

"Son," the bishop said, "I like your part of the story. Are the alligators really so dangerous?"

"Not always, holy father, not always, but sometimes we fear them."

Then all the priests fell to discussing the story, telling of dangers and struggles they had passed through in their zeal for the Church. And I, listening, thought but kept my own counsel, and made it clear to my mind how much I might trust the stories told by the priests. Only the men in torn brown garments were silent, the others did all the talking.

Then the bishop rose from his chair and dismissed us. The priests left the room, and we who had served had freedom with the abundance of food that remained, and for once I believe I had more than I really could eat. When satisfied, I rested, but the other boys urged me to eat all that I could, for not every night would there be such a feast, and sometimes one must go hungry because they made much of fasting. To me this seemed very strange that they should sometimes eat in abundance and at other times, though there was plenty, they all should go hungry; and remembering, I kept my counsel, believing that this was another fancy with about as much fact as the story Padre Tomás had told.

Somehow I did not care so much for eating that night, and was glad when we were directed to go back to our rooms, and presently I was alone, listlessly idling, and wondering at the babble of voices which rising from the corridors went echoing and reëchoing about in the great courtyard. Suddenly a great bell sounded, and the voices all died away, and after that the night

was still; yet I did not care to sleep. I was thinking of José and my own life in our village. Presently some one tapped on my door and then opening it a little said, not unkindly:

"The rules require that all lights must be darkened after the night-bell has sounded. Put yours out and go to sleep; rest for to-morrow."

"But I don't want to sleep."

"That can't be helped, and the light must be out. Nor are you allowed to leave your room till the morning."

I said no more, but obeying, put out the light, and lay down as if I would sleep, yet no sleep came to my eyes.

As I lay awake I heard Padre Tomás snoring, I was sure it was he; then others began, and soon one and another took up the disturbance, till the night was hideous with puffings and wheezings. Then I heard a soft step on the corridors, a light tap on the door next to mine, and a boy's voice saying:

"Have you come to sleep with me to-night?"

And another boy's voice replied, "Yes, hear how the fatties are snorting it up. No danger that they will come and find us," and low, whispering voices attested companionship in the cell next to my own.

Then I heard at times soft footfalls outside my door and subdued voices. Some one said, "Let's go in and see how the Indian would take it."

And another replied, in a whisper, "Not yet; we can play tricks on him by and by."

Softly I went to my door and opening it carefully peeped out, and saw the long corridor flooded with

moonlight, black shadows from the pillars and archways falling in startling contrast. Two boys in white nightshirts went past like ghosts flitting on in the night; they were seeking companions in other rooms. Then other ghostlike forms appeared and were lost again as the boys sought each other on nocturnal visits, the daring ones breaking the rules and going where they were forbidden. I noticed that some of the younger attendants were also abroad, and that the boys hid in the shadows so as to avoid them. All the while the fat priests were snoring and made hideous sounds on the night. I went back to my cell and after a time fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BOYS' PROTECTOR

NEXT morning Pablo came to call me, and tell me the rules and what I should do for the day. I took occasion to ask why the priests snored so much with their noses, and Pablo, looking wise, said, "You believe in the devil and all evil spirits. You go on a journey and the people all make a great outcry and noisy clamour to frighten away evil spirits. Think you that the priests can ever cease from combating evil, and think you the devil is not lurking about here at night? So the priests snore to frighten the devil, for that is their duty."

"Yes," I said, satisfied, for I knew this was truth, and I began to think that I might believe what Pablo told me, even though I might doubt the priests after hearing Padre Tomás's story to which I had borne witness. But what did I care? I would be witness whenever he wanted, so long as his stories did no harm to me, or to mine, or the people in my own distant village.

My first duty was to go with the class for religious instruction, taking my place with the very smallest of all the boys in the school, the other scholars laughing to see me. With the tiny boys I went to a room where a

grave, scholarly priest was waiting. He would give us religious instruction, our first task of the day, while the mind was still fresh and keen, and the stomach not yet heavy with eating.

He made a long discourse, too tiresome to be remembered, how God became a man, and the Pope was made the successor of God, and all must therefore obey him. But I had heard the priests' stories before, and marking what he said, with what I knew of Padre Tomás's fancies, I believed not at all, and paid no heed to his teachings. This he noticed, and bade me remain when the others were going, that he might talk with me further.

I was told that I must remember his lessons, for later I must pass an examination, and failing to answer correctly any question he might ask, I would be most severely punished. I looked at him respectfully and said, "Padre, I remember all you told us this morning. God was made man, and now the Pope succeeds him on earth, and we all must obey him and we do obey him. Padre, you know that yourself."

"What an excellent retentive mind," the old priest said, half to himself and partly to me. "Son, I will see you are carefully instructed, and, God granting the time, will give you lessons apart from the others."

Then the elderly priest told me to go to mass with the boys, and I immediately went to the courtyard and followed after a group on their way to the church.

"Here," one shouted, "you don't go with us, you go with the babies. You're in their class," and the little group turned to combat my further progress. Indians always yield when there is a reason, and,

saying nothing, wait their time, and I determined that he who mocked me should later know what kind of fists I carried, and have experience in some of the fighting tricks known to the Indians. Now there was nothing to do but to join the little boys who stood timidly about the door waiting for their elders to enter.

"You are my mates," I said, going among them, distressed to find that they all shrank away from me; but in time they would know me better.

"Why don't you go in?" I asked.

"The big boys won't let us," a tiny fellow replied. "We must wait till they have gone in."

"And it always makes us late," a plaintive little voice came from another bit of a boy.

"Oh, that's it, is it, and we have a right to go in when we want to?"

"The rules say so, but the big boys say no, and what can we do?" the first who had answered made complaining reply.

"I'll see about that, come with me," and the little boys followed, all excitement to have found a champion. At the side door leading to the church some older boys were loafing; one, the largest, seeing us coming, stood threateningly, barring the door.

"Is this the way to go into the church?" I asked, as we came up to him.

He made no reply, but put his foot over the sill to bar our progress. This was too much for an Indian to stand. His collar gave me a convenient grip, and the next instant he was sprawling down in the dust of the courtyard where I had thrown him. One boy who had jumped to his aid, I flung on top of him. The others

kept their distance, and no more opposition offered, though my opponents had sprung to their feet. The little boys and I marched into the church, they going before me while I stood at the door for their protection. Service had not yet begun, and presently a priest passing down the church stopped to speak to the little boys and commend them that for once they had come in on time. Angry looks came from the older boys, but my fame for strength was established, and that was something.

My little friend, the first who had spoken to me, now came close to my side, and said, "Will you take care of us all to-night?"

"Of course, you are my mates. What's the danger?"

"The big boys will come after us."

"They had better not. Tell them that for me."

Then the priests came in, and the service was opened, and I paid strict attention. The music was beautiful, but not so good as ours, at least so I thought; but I liked to see all the people who had come in at the great front door of the church.

After a time the service was over, and the attendants coming, marshalled us all for coffee. Every one kept good order, and that was best, for I learned that disobedience meant no coffee, and we all wanted it badly enough.

We were served in a great room where there were tables and were expected each to help himself, and to aid one another. Two priests stood guard, one at either end of the room, and several attendants kept order under their direction. We each had a big cup of black coffee with brown sugar in it, some bread, as

much as we wanted, some cheese, a little for each, and some jelly. The morning was hot, the air grown heavy, and what we had was enough, because by eleven o'clock there would be the *almuerzo*, the principal meal of the day.

When coffee was nearly finished, the priests went away, leaving strict orders that discipline should be maintained, but no sooner had they gone out of the room than a piece of bread soaked in coffee hit the chief attendant square on his ear. With an angry look he took out a note-book and said, "I will report you at once," at which all the boys laughed; and from behind him came a piece of hard bread which struck the ceiling, falling before him with a clattering sound.

"I will report you again. Let the second attendant ring the bell for dismissal."

The bell sounded, and at the same instant crusts of bread, bits of cheese, and even splashings of coffee, were thrown about, most of them hitting or falling near the attendants, as the boys made their way out of the room, pushing and jostling one against another. One or two attendants, caught in the crowd, were forced with the boys out into the courtyard, but there was no outcry or noise. The boys all knew better, and kept their voices suppressed, else punishment would be meted out, and punishments were to be dreaded, as later I learned to my sorrow.

In the courtyard a group of priests were standing, and immediately all the boys became orderly and most respectful. The priests had seen the disorder and sharply reprovéd the luckless senior attendant, telling him to watch more thoroughly over his duties and not

let the boys run into a mob of disorder. Explanations were useless, and the boys grinned in derision, not daring to do more, for here everything was suppression. Then in orderly lines all went to the class-rooms, I taking my place with the very small boys, while mocking eyes laughed and sometimes derisive fingers were pointed at me, but I was repaid by the rapturous welcome afforded by little hands, not yet grown strong, that patted my arms with half-frightened affection. We all sat at our places and books were brought for us to study. The little friend I had first spoken to at the church sat beside me, and seeing the perplexed look on my face, whispered, "Don't you know anything at all? Not anything?"

"No, but I am going to learn. What's your name?"

"José."

How that name woke my heart-feelings as I said to him, "My name is Joaquín."

Then the priest in charge rapped his desk sharply for order and said, "No talking. Attend now to your lessons," and immediately a chorus of small boys' voices filled the room, for they must study aloud; it was a vigorous noise, all seeking to make their voices clear to the teacher.

I was called to the desk and given instruction in a most puzzling matter, the alphabet, a group of signs meaning letters and each letter expressed by four different signs, as if one would not have been sufficient. However, I was there to learn what they taught me; and after the priest told me how the names of the letters should be pronounced, I went back to my seat and shouted them out one after the other. This kept up for an

hour; then one by one the boys were called to the desk for instruction, and when my turn came I found that I could recite the alphabet without any trouble, and that I could call most of the letters by sight. The priest said I had done well, and the next lesson would be in short words.

Another priest came in, and he and the first exchanged salutations. Then he who had taught me the letters went out, and the new priest began giving us oral instruction in Latin, making us say words over and over and explaining their meaning. I made good progress and pleased my teacher, and just when it was becoming somewhat interesting, another priest came and with the Latin teacher exchanged salutations, and then took charge of the room. He taught us figures, symbols again, each one meaning a figure, but they were more rational than letters, because each figure had but one symbol, and as I had learned already to count, I soon had these well in my mind and the teacher was pleased.

Three hours had now been passed in continuous study, and the close air of the room with the heat of the morning made my head tired. Among the little boys I noticed flushed faces and wearied eyes, and when the bell sounded for rest it was welcome. From different parts of the building came groups of boys, and soon a babble of voices filled the corridors and courtyard.

The small boys gathered about me, and José, my little friend, came and laid his head on my arm, feeling my muscles with his two hands. "Why, your arm is as big as any boy's leg, and yet you don't know anything, do you?"

I had to admit that I didn't, but told him there were no schools in my village, and from this it was a natural step to stories of my people, and my former life in the woods. We passed a happy hour together, he telling many things I wanted to know and I telling of scenes which the boys had not even imagined existed.

Then José said, "Come to the upper corridor and see where we sleep, because we will want you to-night."

So we went up-stairs to a part of the building which I had not noticed, a balcony off the main corridor. Here were rooms with many small beds curtained off to make private alcoves, where each little boy slept.

"See how easy it is," José said. "All you have to do is to stand in the corridor and not let the big boys come down. Oh, won't they be frightened to see you!" and José clapped his hands in delight, while his companions capered about with him, all expressing their joy to have found a stalwart champion. I was troubled somewhat at the prospect, because it was against the rules, but I would not desert my companions, and that was all there was to consider.

"When shall I come?" I asked.

"When the priests set up the holy snoring."

"Yes," I replied.

"Oh, there is no danger," continued José. "The devil must be afraid of such terrible noises made by the good priests. How frightened we would be up here by ourselves if they didn't snore all together."

Then the bell sounded the call for *almuerzo*. We were hungry, and made no delay in reaching the room where we were served. A fat priest with a kind face

was at the door to receive us. We made our respects and he said, laughing:


"Here the boys are always on time. Go in and eat plenty, for to-morrow is a fast-day." Seeing me, he said, "Joaquín, you may sit with the bigger boys if you wish."

"Thank you humbly, padre, I stay with my companions, that is if I can."

The priest looked his approval and said, "I have always heard that the Indians were loyal friends."

The little boys expressed their appreciation by friendly caresses as they led me to a seat at their table, and each one prepared to share with me so that I might eat of the best, but this I would not allow, for we all should share equally. We had soup and dry bread, all we wanted, meat cooked in oil with savoury flavours, not too much of that, but rice and black beans in abundance, all we could take; and after this coffee, white cheese, and stewed fruit, heavily sweetened.

When *almuerzo* was finished came study-time once again, and we went, though our steps lagged on the way. In the schoolroom a new priest entered, a little man with a quick, nervous manner. He taught us writing. That was one of the things I most wished to learn, and so gave diligent attention, and now saw that for more convenience in writing different forms of letters were used. The teacher complimented me on my work, and scolded most of the little boys roundly; then he went away, and the old priest who had lectured on doctrine that morning came again and taught us, this time making us answer questions over and over again.



One little boy asked the reason for some of the answers he taught us, and the old priest replied, with severity, "Never question, believe. It is true because the Church tells you. Your duty is to believe, that is all," and he made us repeat his reply many times.

He went away, and the priest who instructed in Latin came, followed later by the instructor in reading and letters, and finally the priest who taught mathematics and figures. At last the day's work was finished, and tired, we went to sit on the shady side of the courtyard. I would have been pleased to go out in the streets, where I might see the city, and I was sure that some woodlands could not be very far distant, because at times the odours of trees and fallen leaves came when the wind blew down into the courtyard; but to go out was forbidden and so we sat in the shade, tired boy prisoners doing nothing till the call came for vespers. This time my little friends and I went into the church, our way undisputed, the little fellows holding themselves proudly and making a point of going in when the bigger boys were just at the door. I stood outside till all my friends were safe, and then went in myself.

"Oh, but the big boys are mad," José whispered, coming close to my side and rubbing his shoulder against me. "Isn't it splendid?"

Services began, the boys all paying attention, and when it was over we went again to the courtyard, where we stood idling about. Finally the bell rang which called us to dinner, and we went without ceremony, though we stopped to make salutations to the priest who was there to receive us.

The dinner was not greatly different from our *almuerzo*; there was soup and dry bread, as before, beef roasted with melted lard, fried plantain, boiled yams, and rice cooked with lard, red peppers, and yellow arnatto berries, to give it a colour and flavour. Then there was cheese, black coffee, and a sweet made of cocoanut grated with sugar. When all had been finished, we went out, not making any disorder, for the day had been hot and we were well tired. The priests came to the courtyard and asked us questions on the work of the day and instructed us in doctrine. For my part I wished there was not so much doctrine, but I had to take what they gave, and, attentive, won their approval.

Now it was grown dark, lanterns which hung in corridors were lighted, the priests went away and we were in the care of the attendants, and as the evening grew cool began to misbehave so far as we could do so with safety. In the upper corridor some of the boys put out all the lights, and when the attendants went to light them again, a wild frolic began in the courtyard. While this was going on, two boys escaped the attendant's notice, and drew caricatures of the priests on the walls of the corridors.

"Who did the drawing?" was asked. No one would tell. Then the whole school would be reported, said the attendant.

At this, José, hidden safely behind me, piped up in his shrill voice, "Better clean it off, Pablo, before a priest sees it, and reports that you can't keep order."

"Silence," Pablo shouted; but, taking the hint, went diligently to work erasing the picture, while we all mocked him with impolite words for his greater

discomfort. He took his revenge, however, and presently the signal was given before it was time, and we were forced to go to our rooms for the night, and quiet was once more restored in the courtyard. As we went up-stairs little José whispered to me, "Don't forget, come to us when the holy snoring begins," and I promised.

CHAPTER XV

THE GHOST

FOR a time I sat alone in my room. Then when one and another priest gave signs that he was sleeping, I stepped quietly out in the corridor, and keeping well in the shadows, made my way to the room where the little boys slept. I found them seated about on their beds, trembling with fear lest I should not come, and the big boys should get them, but now their fear was changed to transports of delight as they crowded about me whispering their welcomes and counselling me what I should do.

Then José and his chief companion, a bright boy, Lorenzo, whispered together and said, presently, "I wonder if he would do it."

"Do what?" I asked.

"Be a ghost," said Lorenzo.

"Not yet, I hope."

"Not a real one. I mean a play ghost, and scare the big boys when they come."

"That might do, but how will you fix it?"

"We have a lot of starch all powdered fine. You take off all your clothes and we will powder you thick with starch; then you stand in the corridor with a big stick in your hand. My, won't it give them a scare!"

The plan seemed rather amusing and might save the trouble of making a fight, to which just then I felt little inclined, so I said we would try it. At this, without more words, each boy began taking off his clothes, for starch leaves a mark on whoever handles it, and in a moment or two we were all of us naked, and for a brief space my little friends capered about in the cool air, taking delight at their unrestrained bodies.

Lorenzo, who was a wise little chap for his years, made my clothes into a bundle, and tied up his own in another. José did the same, telling me as he did so that when the big boys became frightened, and raised the alarm, they must show me the way to my room, having found a passage to my corridor where we could go safely. All the boys fell to work decorating my body with starch, exclaiming at my great muscles, and admiring my strength. My face and my hair were made white, about my eyes black lines were drawn with soft, powdered charcoal, and looking at myself in a glass it was plain that I was a terrible sight. Just then the bell sounded that all lights should be put out, our room was darkened, and the little boys sat on their beds, all excitement, waiting for something to happen. For myself, all the mischief which is strong in an Indian took delight in this adventure, and with a big club in my hand I stepped out of the room.

The moon was shining, but here gave only indistinct rays, for the corridor was but a narrow balcony between two buildings. I waited a little and presently heard some one coming.

Yes, I could hear voices; some of the older boys were on their way to frighten the little chaps who had

dared to transgress their orders. Cautiously they came down the corridor, not yet noticing me. I saw they carried a whip, and had grotesque masks on their faces. On they came, and I with my stick held aloft waited their coming. The next instant they stopped and bent their bodies forward, as if to make sure their eyes did not deceive them. Never a muscle I moved, but stood like a statue; there was an instant like a long, undrawn breath, then collapsing, they half fell to the floor and with horrified cryings they fled down the corridor to the main building, crying out, "The ghost! the ghost! the apparition!" I stood my ground, wishing now to have their outcryings confirmed, and soon heard others coming. I did not notice Lorenzo and little José, who stood at their door making terrified gestures that I should come to them.

I heard a trembling voice, which I recognized as Pablo's, saying, "Where is it?"

Another voice answered, "Ay, good Pablo, you who fought a troop of wild alligators, it is you who are brave. Go in and rescue the little ones."

"Perhaps it has gone away now."

I stepped into a shadow, and the terror-stricken faces of José and Lorenzo disappeared in their room.

With faltering footsteps Pablo came toward me, but I was concealed in a shadow. He stopped, as if fearful to come on, but when those in the rear said, "Brave Pablo," he took a few steps forward. Now he was near me, and making a strange whistling sound by sucking air through my teeth I stepped out of the shadow, and raising my club, moved with a gliding motion toward him. His face became livid and then

ashen pale, his jaw dropped, and his eyes protruded. I thought he would surely fall at my feet in a swoon, but the next instant the reaction of fear asserted its influence. He uttered one piercing shriek, fled down the corridor and out into the main building, where the others had earlier retreated, and now shriek after shriek disturbed the calm of the night. Through all the building there was great commotion, though I could tell by the holy snoring, now only somewhat abated, that most of the priests undisturbed were keeping up their good work of scaring the devil.

Back to the little boys' room I went, and found José and Lorenzo waiting. "Come, we must run for it," they said, both in the same breath. To the lower end of the corridor we went, carrying our bundles, and crawled through an opening to a lower roof, where the pattering of our feet disturbed the quiet. A moment more we came to an old neglected stairway, and mounting this cautiously, we reached a small corridor which led to the main balcony near my room. Thither we arrived safe and entirely unseen. The little boys fell to work dusting off the starch from my body, the delight at the commotion their subterfuge was raising seemed almost beyond their means of expression. When I had been well dusted they put on their night-clothes and made for the door.

"Don't you stay here for the night?" I asked.

"Not we. Everybody will be called up pretty soon. But the saints of God! Pablo must have gone crazy. Hear how he keeps up his shrieking. Just hear those big boys, they are crying like babies. Oh, what fun!"

"But don't you feel afraid to go alone? Don't you have fear of the ghost?"

"No, we love him," and José came back and threw his arms about me, while Lorenzo, not to be outdone, caressed my face and neck with his hands.

With a finger to their lips, cautioning silence, they slipped out of the door. A light pattering of feet, an echoing ripple of laughter, and I knew that my little friends were safe on their way. Lighting my lamp I hastily arranged my clothes, washed my face, and lay down. My light was out again none too soon, for at that instant a knock called me to my feet. Opening the door I saw the old priest who gave us instruction in doctrine. He was angry, and coming in, said, "What can you tell me in regard to all this?" Quickly I replied, "The Pope, as the successor of God on the earth, has a right to command our obedience," my expression indicating that I thought he had come to examine me in his doctrinal teachings.

"Boy, not that. I mean this noise, what can you tell me of it?"

"Padre, I have not been so far instructed, but to me it seemed very strange. Wise teachings it must be, but how can I answer when I have not been instructed?"

"This is not teaching. Put on your clothes, your pantaloons over your nightshirt will do. Make haste, we must see what this means, and your strength may be of good service."

Respectfully following the priest, we went to the place where Pablo was hysterically telling how the ghost had attacked him, and the tearful boys were confirming

all that he said, admitting they had done wrong in going on an errand to frighten the little ones.

"Come, Joaquín," said the priest, "let us go to the minor dormitory and see how the little boys have fared through it all." At the corridor the priest hesitated, and then bidding me go in first, followed cautiously some distance behind.

I went with fear, for surely starch marks would show what had been done; but José and Lorenzo had wise little heads, and every trace had been picked up; even the secret passageway had been cleaned and dust thrown over it, that no traces might be left to give evidence against us. Arriving at the boys' room, the old priest became bolder, for nothing had threatened on our way through the corridor. He expected to find the little boys trembling, perhaps swooning with fear, but to his amazement he found the room lighted and each little fellow perched up on his bed demurely reading his breviary.

"Little friends, little friends, what sight is this that greets my old eyes? Were you not afraid? Did you not hear all the outcry that the apparition had come among us?"

"Afraid? Why, no," Lorenzo replied, and José said, "Did you not tell us the Virgin would always be near us?" and a chorus of small, innocent voices chimed in, "No, we were not afraid," as they all flocked about him to kneel for his blessing.

"Oh, my old eyes! Oh, blessed sight! The holy saints, the blessed Virgin, and God himself must look down on this night. Whatever it was that appeared, it came not to harm but protect our innocent charges.

But," as if musing to himself he continued, "I cannot see how it would have threatened our good brave Pablo to cause him such sore distress." Then he blessed each little boy, and bade them go back to their beds and sleep till the morning, that while their trust was in God and the Virgin no harm would ever come to them.

Lorenzo, lightly springing to his feet, said, "Padre, dear padre, we are not one bit afraid, but do let Joaquín stay with us. We all do so much love him."

"Oh, yes, we all love him so much," came a chorus of voices. "Do, padre, let him stay with us."

"Well, perhaps. I scarcely know what to say. It is not according to rule," but as the pleadings continued, I said, "I am lonely, padre, and I also wish it."

"Well, you may stay," said the old priest. "Protect our little charges this night, for later their faith may be lost in their fears. To-morrow come to me early."

When the priest, after giving his blessing, had left, Lorenzo said, "Now put out the lights and tell stories. Joaquín sleeps with me to-night."

"No, with me. I found him first," said José.

"José to-night. I knew him first, and perhaps Lorenzo to-morrow," I said, so settling any dispute.

Then sitting on José's bed, the little fellow nestled close to me, saying, "Oh, isn't this lovely, and there isn't a single big boy who dares come and tease us."

We sat for a time telling each other of our different lives. Truly I was big and strong, but for all that I was a little boy with them, and the instinct of wonder was still strong within me.

Finally I got them all in their beds and was soon

drowning off, José nestled close at my side. Indians have but little conscience. I had deceived a good priest, had raised a disturbance, and had helped the little boys' mischief, yet I gave no thought at all to these things.

Next morning the boys' dormitory was in commotion. A pillow fight was in progress, the united troop of small boys endeavouring to down their late protector. The fight was not long, for I knew the old priest would expect me, and now I hurried with all the little boys to splash in a cool bath, then dressed as I could and went to my own room to finish, and after that down to the old priest's study.

Here I found him waiting, and much good advice and careful instruction he gave me. When it was nearly time for the class to begin, he said, "Joaquín, tell me what is your surname."

"Padre, I don't know what that means; they just call me Joaquín."

"That is only your name in baptism."

"Yes," I replied, not wishing to commit myself, nor knowing what baptism was.

"Then we will call you Buenevento, and the Church will have a strong man to serve her if I mistake not the signs."

"Yes, padre," I said.

"See, my son, look at this. I talked with the bishop last night, and here is a paper for you. The little boys love you so much that we give them to your charge. I must read you the paper, soon you will read it all for yourself."

"We, Teófilo, by the Grace of God and of the Holy See, Bishop of St. Joseph's, do appoint Joaquín Buen-

evento secretary attendant on the Reverend Father Maximo to have monitorship over the boys' dormitory in the School of St. Joseph, giving and granting to our beloved Joaquín all the rights, benefits, and privileges of a secretary attendant in and about the School of St. Joseph, to continue during our pleasure.' "

This was signed by the bishop, and then the old priest threw a black gown over my shoulders, a belt of cord fastened it at the waist, and a black, tasselled cap was set on my head. When the little boys came trooping in, they were told I was to take care of them each night, at which their delight and thanks knew no bounds; but Lorenzo whispered to me, "You will take that black rag off at night, won't you? And then you will be one of us," and I whispered back that I would.

The lessons began, and I was all attention. After that we went to mass, the older boys giving us respectful passing, for my gown and the fame of my strength made a good impression among them. From the upper corridor I saw Pablo's face, still pale and haggard from his terrible fright, scowling down at me. I was revenged on him now, and, my spirit contented, went into the church, taking care that no one molested the boys in my charge.

This was a fast-day, and that morning after mass we had nothing but coffee and bread, for the first breakfast, but of this we had as much as we would. Then the day passed as the others, in study, and idling during the hours of recreation. At *almuerzo* no meat was served. We had black beans and dried peas in plenty, with rice, coffee, and cheese, but no sweets.

That afternoon I was told to arrange a room for myself in the little boys' corridor, and this I did with pleasure, all my little friends helping. To my surprise the big fellow who the first day had trodden on my bare toes came to say he was sorry, and that he had heard how brave I was. Perhaps he had heard, too, that some night I would thrash him, but now it was all peaceful between us, and apparently not a cloud lay on my future's horizon.

CHAPTER XVI

PUNISHMENT

At the school I was well established, and soon every one there had become a friend to me. With my studies I made rapid progress, and at night my pent-up spirits were relieved by wild romps with the boys in my charge, and each day they grew healthier and happier under my care. In every life there must be some little time when the sun of good fortune shines. How happy those days were at school, what wonders were opened to my inquisitive mind, how I studied and worked and achieved, and seemed to absorb information from every one and everything near me! I was contented and strong, well-appearing I knew, and of the calm Indian temper not easily roughed, though when once aroused the passions of hell are not fiercer. My heart in gratitude overflowed with affection for every one in that school, even clumsy Pablo and fat Padre Tomás.

One thing, however, I never forgot, the alligator story; and whenever they told me strange things I thought of Padre Tomás fighting the alligators which had not even existed; and thus, while I remembered whatever they told, but little faith responded in me to their teachings, though I learned everything; for that reason had I come. I found, however, that I was not

the only person who doubted, though I was careful not to give my doubts expression.

One day, in our lesson on doctrine, we were told that patience was a virtue, which we were all prepared to admit; but when, a little later, the instructor told us to remember that "Virtue was its own reward," and bade us cultivate virtue for its own sake, one of the bigger boys, in evident mischief, made bold to ask, if patience was a virtue and virtue was its own reward, what could one get for patience. Severely the priest looked at him for a moment, and then the boy was dismissed from the room and told to report to the Governor. That meant punishment, and those who knew shuddered for him. I had been some months in the school, and of the punishment I as yet knew nothing, but I was yet to learn. The priest said, "Joaquín, you are strong; go and assist the Governor and call Pablo. He understands that work well."

The boy who had made bold to ask irreverent questions went trembling out of the door, I following him.

"Joaquín," he said, in a thick voice, his words uncertain, "don't let them do it. I can't stand it again," and he seemed ready to swoon at my feet. I caught his arm, and shaking him rudely, bade him proceed on his way. He would richly deserve to suffer for doubting and questioning a priest.

I called Pablo and that ill-visaged creature came with a shuffling walk, a cruel delight in his face, and mocked the boy whom I held by the arm. Between us we dragged him along, trembling and screaming for mercy. The school had assembled, and all with

awestricken faces, some even pallid, watched us. We went through a door near the church, half-dragged, half-lifted the boy down a steep flight of stairs, and stood in a deep, gloomy dungeon. Here dark scenes had been enacted in days long gone past, and now it was used as a place where the boys might be punished.

"You keep him here," said Pablo, his voice smacking of excited delight, "and I'll go bring the Governor." The poor boy was now trembling and seemed half-bereft of his reason. Why was it that in those days kindness filled my heart only, with warm pulsation of affection for all, where later hatred should burn and never find rest? The boy could scarcely stand for his terror, and I put a strong arm about him, and held him close to me. With that act of kindness he threw his arms up over my shoulders, clinging to me and trembling, pleading with me not to let them do it again.

What could I say, or what could I do? I simply held him close to me, and encouraged him with words that might urge him to suffer with valour. Then I heard footsteps and Pablo's derisive voice, and the voice of another who was with him. From the passageway a light gleamed and Pablo came in, with a black form beside him, the face and the figure covered with a long cloak, and after them came two others in black, bearing a wooden object. Seeing this the poor boy screamed, and clung to me still more closely, saying:

"Joaquín, oh, Joaquín, please don't let them do it, oh, please don't let them do it!" but all the while those black forms made no response and seemed to take no notice. The object they bore was quickly adjusted, a stand-post was set up in the ground, a

cross-piece laid over a support on its top, and to this cords were attached, and I saw two rings on the floor one on each side of the post. A cold chill ran through my body, an ominous horror thrilled in my heart. What was I to see? My senses were numbed, my breathing oppressive.

From my arms they dragged the boy, now moaning with fright, rudely stripped his clothes from his body, and forced him, trembling and pleading, to the post, and as they dragged him along, I looked on, silent in horror. To each ring in the floor a foot was fastened; the boy, now gasping, could no longer plead for mercy. A rope was tied to each wrist, and these ropes passed through holes at the ends of the cross-piece. Like fiends they began to stretch the poor body, the Governor standing by with a long, light lash, to lay on the skin, when drawn sufficiently tight; the boy quivering and moaning, while Pablo stood by, grinning and snickering.

I, with my senses all sickened, stood and did nothing. The Governor raised his lash, and through my veins surged a hot torrent. I scarcely knew what I did, but three black figures went down in the dust of the dungeon, and before they could rise I had freed the suffering boy.

With his naked body limp in my arms, I went bounding up the stairs of the dungeon, breaking the door with one blow, my heart's excitement, my burning rage, lending me strength. Through the courtyard I went, and without hesitating sought the door which led to the bishop's apartments. A priest barred my way, but one look was sufficient to turn him aside, nor did I wait to ask permission, but went straight to the inner rooms with unfaltering steps. There the bishop was writing,

with a secretary by him busily helping. Without a word I knelt at his feet, and laid the boy on the carpet before him.

"Holy father, shall murder be done in your house?" and the boy moaning, clung to my knees, that I might remain close to him.

"Murder, murder? What can you mean? Joaquín, explain. What is this?"

"They stretched the boy on the whipping-mast, down in the dungeon, and were going to beat him."

"And you stopped them?"

"Ay, holy father, I stopped them."

"Joaquín," said the bishop, "you must know that the Church has a soft, gentle hand for those who obey her, goodness and mercy and blessings; but for those who transgress, the way is hard and severe. This boy has long troubled his good instructors, and he should have been punished."

Perhaps it was the look in my eyes that made the bishop pause for an instant. They say an Indian's eyes will sometimes burn like fire.

"Father, holy father, they did more than the body could bear," I exclaimed. "They were stretching him even to death."

"No, Joaquín, that has been proven otherwise. It is pain, I know, when the stretching is carried too far, but death it does not bring, though each snap of the lash may draw blood. Perhaps they were going too far. I will see to it and order my pardon for your interference." Then to the boy he said:

"And you, misguided son, do you promise and

swear, that through all your life you will humbly hear and obey what the Church teaches? ”

And the boy, in a whisper, said, “ Holy father, I promise and swear it,” and turning to me the bishop said, “ See, Joaquín, could teaching and other correction have done so much for him? Now go,” and the bishop dismissed us with a gentle wave of his hand.

I bowed low to the bishop, and in my arms carried the boy, as if my burden were nothing, going to my own room, my new charge still trembling, and sobbing sighs breaking out at times, though he tried to control them. I laid him down on my bed, and with cool water bathed all his body, lingering over him with brooding affection. The little boys came peeping in at the door, but at my bidding went softly back to their room. We were alone, and the boy I had rescued lay quietly, one hand grasping mine, the other held fast to the sheets. His breast heaved with a long, trembling sigh, and he fell asleep.

Many doubts had been in my heart, and these were intensified now by a smouldering contempt; but of one thing I was sure, the bishop was good and so was the old priest who had taught us doctrine, although he had ordered the boy’s punishment. As for the others, had I not heard Padre Tomás’s story? They all were the same, contempt was all I had for them, but because of the bishop I would always work loyally for the Church.

As I left my room I saw there was something unusual in the confined atmosphere of the courtyard. Priests went hurrying to the bishop’s apartments, and kept going back and forth, stopping to consult in groups and then hurrying away on their several affairs.

Curious eyes were directed at me, and presently an attendant came to say that I was wanted, the bishop would see me.

Without fear and with confident step I sought the good man I held in such esteem, and reaching his room, knelt reverently, expecting the usual blessing, but no blessing was given, nor did I receive permission to arise.

I saw now that several priests were sitting behind the bishop, and at one side of the room stood Pablo and others with him. The bishop wore an expression sad, indignant, stern, but I looked at him in no way flinching or faltering.

"Joaquín," he said, "what is all this I find witnessed against you? In the little boys' room there is nightly a scene of confusion. Children who should be restrained are allowed to romp about naked, and when the evening is cool, play rough games, when they should be at their devotions; and further, it is reported, the little boys have lost all respect for the older students. Joaquín, what answer have you?"

"Holy father, the boys only play a little before they sleep for the night. I thought it better to let them have freedom rather than leave them talking together till sleep should overcome them. As to their devotions, I am not so well learned that I can teach them."

"A reasonable answer. Now, what say you to this? You are accused, and witnesses here will attest it, that your manner is not one of respect to the priests and the elder students, nor are you, in your devotions, attentive as one should be who has received the Church's favour. Answer, what have you to say?"

"Devotion is in my heart, holy father, but I am an

Indian, and my face is naturally cold and my bearing one of reserve. They witness against me, for that which I am, as God made me."

"Truly the boy answers with wisdom. What can you say to this accusation? You are charged with attacking a priest, with forcing him to the ground with one savage blow, and his attendants you also attacked. Tell us now what excuse have you for this?"

"Holy father, the men were covered, and I knew them as not my spiritual masters. The boy was tormented with terrors, and he had been kind to me long ago when I came here as a stranger, and so I fought for him as an Indian will always fight for a friend."

"A somewhat reasonable answer. Did you not hear a priest order the boy to be punished?"

"Ay, holy father, but that was not punishment."

"Joaquín," and the bishop's face grew cold and severe with an expression that I did not like, "I wish I might treat you differently. You have grievously sinned and transgressed, but before hearing the case I had given you pardon, and because of that I cannot punish you as you deserve. Now answer me clearly. Was this the whip to be used in chastising the boy?"

"Yes, holy father, if I remember right that is the whip."

"Examine it, then. Is it light and switchlike, to sting the skin, yet not bruise the flesh?"

"That it seems, holy father."

"And when they prepared to draw the boy up, were any springs, screws, tackles, or other devices used to stretch the body with great violence?"

"Only the weight of the men who were to pull on the ropes."

"And for this you made free to attack and beat down to the ground the servants of the Church, and deny the Church's authority, even in its own buildings?"

"The boy was my friend when I was a stranger."

"And for that you would attack a reverend priest, a padre in holy orders?"

"I answered before, that I did not know he was a priest. I did not know it."

"Be more careful in how your answers are worded. Hearken now, and remember. The Church teaches and acts with and of its own right, and its authority is above the laws, above everything human; it is infallible, supreme and eternal. The holy Pope reigns over the Church with authority from God, till, when in eternity, God shall so reign himself, and take the Church, his people, into his own mighty keeping. Before such authority tremble, bow down, and worship, conduct yourself with reverence in fear. Never again dare raise your arm or even your doubts against any teaching or act which the Church may sanction. Joaquín, I gave you pardon, else you would now be punished and bear for all your life scars of the stripes you so richly deserve. Go now, and hereafter be careful."

I rose from my knees, made the bishop low reverence, and bent my knee to the priests. The bishop made a gesture, motioning with his hand toward the door, and I was dismissed. In the courtyard I found many students gathered, and in the upper corridor the little boys were all waiting. Evidently they had expected

to see me brought out on my way to the dungeon. I saw and knew they were pleased, but demonstrations were dangerous, and none dared indulge, — only as I went to my room the little boys crowded around me as usual.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CHRISTMAS VACATION

AFTER these events I was careful and studied more diligently, the weeks and months slipping away. With time I became proficient in many things; writing and reading were now easy to me, much practising had made me familiar with Latin, and mathematics seemed my natural field, for the Indian is exact and does nearly everything by rule, though he may not know why.

One day the old priest who taught us doctrine took me to a room full of books, more books than I thought could be in all the world, and he gave me permission to come and read as I would. Soon it became my greatest desire to live with those books, and with an unappeased ardour I read each day in wonder at the things and conditions of our times, and of ancient days. Here was my delight, and the old priest said he knew I would be a great student and that each night he said a prayer for me that I might give my life to the Church, and become a priest in her service.

This was not what I wanted. My desire was to obtain knowledge, and thereby to gain secure possession of our rubber-trees, for my foster-father José and for myself, — and obtaining these titles, drive Don Ignacio and Don Jaime out of our village. I would be chief and *patrón* all in one. But of this I said nothing.

My great delight was in the books, and treasured among them were some accounts of the law which I studied with care, yet I did not forget my first friends, the little boys, who clung to me with such loving fondness. We had our subdued romp in the evening before they all went to bed, and after that I hurried down to the books, often the daylight surprising me still reading.

I had been there nearly a year and presently December came and the school was to be closed for the Christmas festival. Most of the boys would go home, but some would stay at the school though no longer as interns. For a month they would be free to come and go as they would. To me this was an opportunity I had long sought, but had not thought it best to ask the privilege, and now it was mine without asking.

The last day at school was a feast of unusual importance. On the day before all the buildings were carefully cleaned, and in the evening flowers and palm branches were brought, and with these the courtyard was all decorated. Flags were hung from the archways, and when the decorations were finished the boys ran about as they would. No punishment now was even thought of, so the night was gay with unrestrained voices. Next morning the flowers were still fresh and beautiful, and while the dew was on them we all went to mass. There the bishop preached a sermon telling us how good the Church had been, how she had thus always been good and so always would be, and we must therefore serve and support her, even giving our lives if she should need them.

We all went to the first breakfast, — coffee, and as an unusual treat we had bread with butter brought from the north. After this each went to his class-room. I had long since left the little boys' class, and now had my place with the oldest students. When all was ready, the priests came out in the courtyard, a great seat was brought for the bishop, and the doors of the class-rooms were left open so that all might see and be seen. He passed through the rooms, and all the school, kneeling, received his blessing.

The great doors of the courtyard were opened, and visitors came, each of whom first went to the bishop and knelt for his blessing, then inspected the school, — for us a tiresome experience. With each party came one of the priests who gave us instruction, and wishing to show the success of his teaching, would put questions to us, and the visitors would also question, while we stood respectfully whenever a party came in, and so remained till they had finished and went to other rooms.

When at last eleven o'clock came, we were impatient and rather tired, but on reaching the dining-hall our impatience turned to delight, for there a feast was waiting such as I had never even imagined. The ladies who had come to visit the school had each brought us something, and as there were many visitors, the good things provided were in proportion abundant. First, as was our duty, we went and made our thanks to the friends who, remembering us so kindly, had honoured us and the school with their presence. Then to the bishop we carried of the gifts brought to us, asking that he would partake, but he found little time to eat, so many people were crowding about him. The priests,

however, took liberal portions of all that we offered, but still there was more than enough. We boys all set to work feasting, singing, and talking together, while the visitors looked on and laughed in delight at our fun and the pranks which we played on one another.

Suddenly Lorenzo, the little rogue, shouted :

“ Say, *compañeros*, let’s turn Joaquín into our holiday bishop.” No protestings could stay them. I, on a pile of chairs, must sit and be called your Señoría and Señoría Ilustrísima, while the little scamps made mock reverence to me until they were tired and found some other play to amuse them. Then, deserted by all my court, I had to climb down from the chairs. From one play to another we went, sometimes only skylarking together, at other times aping our elders, and again singing in chorus such hymns or tunes as suited our fancy. And all the time we continued our eating.

The great bell in the church sounded, and high mass was celebrated, made as impressive as the resources of that church would permit. After this the bishop gave us his blessing, and crowding now in our haste before all the visitors, like a sudden eruption we poured out into the street, and were free for a month, a whole four weeks and three days in which to do just what we pleased.

We didn’t stop to say good-bye to each other; there was too much else to attract our attentions. Some of the boys went off with their parents or friends, setting out on journeys of considerable length; others went directly home, for many lived in the city. I went looking about the streets, wondering at all, stopping, for friendly words and inquiries, those who would talk with me.

My greatest interest was to see where all the rubber sent from our country could be used, and was disappointed when I learned that it was all shipped over the sea to other countries, and a realizing sense of the broad extent of the vast round world came over me.

I set to work to learn such things as I thought desirable, but which were not taught by the Church, and went about inquiring the prices of everything, noting them all down in a little book, and then I got the price at which rubber was sold. I found the value of the goods Don Ignacio and Don Jaime gave us in exchange for our rubber, and with the notes I had made could now calculate what we should justly receive. It was growing late in the afternoon and I went back to school. After dinner with the attendants and a few scholars who still remained, I went to my room, through the corridors, now silent. I could not help but stop a few moments and think of the little boys so widely separated, each one going home, and probably not one taking any thought of the others.

I set to work and was soon absorbed in my calculations, and as I continued anger grew in my heart. My father, José, in debt! Our other people in debt! Not one-tenth the value of their rubber had been paid them. In anger I threw down my writing, and pacing the room, let hate and thoughts of revenge flame up. I kept saying to myself, over and over, "I hate Don Ignacio, and I hate Don Jaime." Though I repeated it again and again, I could not think of any plan by which I could check their swindling and grasping transactions, but I said to myself, it would not remain long

for them to continue their time of oppression. One year more, and I would have learned enough, and then would go back to my people, and when they had been told all, in fancy I pictured the just deaths of the *patrons*, Don Ignacio's first because I hated him most. The death they would find in the forests might not be the most pleasant, in fact it might be well assured that the pains which their debtors had suffered these many years would in a few hours be heaped by them in retribution on their oppressors. Yes, Don Ignacio and Don Jaime would meet a cruel fate when I went back to my people, and letting my fancy run free, my resentment unbridled, I sat till late in the night.


With the morning I went again as soon as circumstances permitted and sought more information, made acquaintances, and in a few days became well known, and, I think, well liked. When I finished my studies and went back to the Indians I would be a person of consideration among them, so perhaps my friendship would be something to the merchants.

I learned that neither Don Jaime nor Don Ignacio were great merchants, but that they were traders, coming often to Cartagena, and were sent by the merchants to gather rubber and other products, and that Don Ignacio was rich from his trading and had his property at San Esteban, a city back in the mountains some days from the coast. This was what I wanted to know. I had much to avenge against Don Ignacio, and so wished to make minute inquiries as to his home, the woman he had there, or wife she might be according to the rules of the Church. I now learned by quick observation that the Church had many good rules which the people

all disregarded, though they kept up some appearance of righteous living, and gave the Church money, so the priests were appeased, though perhaps not really satisfied. But being wise, they took what they could and were pleasant to the people, continually trying to get more. I soon found out that Don Ignacio's wife was dead, but there lived in his home a niece, her beauty the talk of all the country around San Esteban. Legally adopted, this daughter of one of his sisters ruled Don Ignacio's house, the one woman to whom he was really attached and whom he held inviolate. This was the one pure incident in the life of Don Ignacio, who had many women at different places, each one established with farms or with little shops, and they all made money for him, but his beautiful niece, she only lived in his house.

When I had become somewhat acquainted with the city and with the merchants I found one firm which I rather liked, and who in turn made much of me. This house had never traded up our river, and saw a chance in me to compete with their rivals. For my part, I fancied that with them we would find better treatment, so our mutual interest was established, and I spent much of my time with them, learning what I could, and they ever ready to teach me.

I soon realized that my own experiences in the woods had given me a knowledge which few could obtain, and when cargoes of rubber were brought from the country I could pick out the good material with such rapid accuracy, that when I was at hand few mistakes were made in judging of prices and values. My new friends were always pleased that



I should be with them, and proposed that when I was through school I should stay awhile in their service before I went back to the woods, and to this I readily agreed.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE NAME OF THE CHURCH

ONE day when I went down to the water-front where the boats came in from the lagoons, I saw Padre Tomás had returned from up-country, and with Pablo was directing the unloading of a great cargo of rubber. This was to pay for my next year at school, — ten times more than the tuition's legitimate worth, but Padre Tomás was ever shrewd at a bargain. Eagerly I asked him about all back in the village, but he was too busy with the unloading to pay much attention to me, and I was told to wait till we reached the school, and then he had good news for me. With kind feelings animating my heart we came to the church, made our way to the now empty corridors, and there met the bishop, an anxious look on his face.

"Ah, Tomás," he said, "you have come in good time. Tell us, what success did you have?"

"Poor success, your Señoría, except that Joaquín's father was liberal in his provision for the young man's coming year at school."

"Ah, Tomás, we had hopes that the men you have served for so long would be more liberal now."

"Yes, but the season was poor, they said, and the traders overextracting."

All this time I was listening but said nothing, then

gave a sudden start as I heard Padre Tomás mention Don Ignacio's name and say: "But Joaquín could help us. He and his father José know of great treasure groves of rubber, of which they will give no one word, and none are keen enough to trace out their secret. Don Ignacio says that Joaquín can tell it. Find that secret from him, and Don Ignacio engages that our contributions to Rome will be full, even as in the best days of our former greatness, when the Catholic Crown of Spain did us loyal service."

Earnestly the eyes of the bishop were searching my face. "Joaquín, is this true?" he said. But I made him no answer.

"Surely, Joaquín," he continued, "the Church has been a good friend to you. I ask in the name of the Church."

I only looked down. How could I answer?

"Joaquín, the Church can give you a great future. It is a noble life for those who serve her. Answer me now and you will never regret it."

But the mask of indifference strong in the Indian was immovable over my features. I had no trust in them, — had I not heard Padre Tomás's story, and did I not know from that how much one might believe them? — and I answered him nothing.

"Joaquín," the bishop said, a dark look marring his face, "come with me."

I followed, and Padre Tomás came too. In a quiet room, surrounded by books and other visible signs and equipments of study, the bishop bade us be seated.

For a time there was silence, then the bishop said, "Joaquín, do you make me no answer?"

"None, holy father, except this. There is no truth in these stories you hear."

"Tell me, Tomás," the bishop said, "what proof or reason have you that there is a great wealth in the woods and that Joaquín knows its location? By grants given to us long ago it should all be ours, had we now our just rights. Let me hear what you know of this story."

"Your Señoría, the proofs to mind are clear. The people where Joaquín lives struggle in debt, but José, Joaquín's father, lives at his ease, yet has no visible possessions at all. The others have nothing, yet José can send a rich provision that Joaquín may be taught by the Church, and whenever he wishes a cargo of rubber, goes to the woods, and in a few days returns bringing enough to richly provide for his wants. These are the proofs. If what I say is not true, how can José always find rubber, though each year there is less and less to be had?"

Padre Tomás stopped speaking. The bishop was deep in thought and said nothing. I too was thinking. For José's advantage and mine, would I be justified in breaking my oath? Could I trust them? Would they be fair with me and give me due share if I told them the secret? Would they protect me and keep me secure in ownership if I should tell them? Could I trust them at all?

"Go, Tomás," said the bishop, "leave me alone with Joaquín. I will explain to him the needs of the Church, and he will be her good servant," and the light of enthusiasm burned in the old bishop's eyes as he looked steadily at me. We were alone, Padre Tomás

had gone. The room was so still that the rustling of a little mouse stealing away under some papers made a jarring sound on the silence, and, looking up, I saw the bishop's eyes, intense in their desire, searchingly fixed on my face.

I heard a low voice, a strange voice that seemed to come from some distant place, saying, "Joaquín, you have taken your first steps in the Church's service. From the very first you were in charge of one part of her work. The little boys have all gone home for a time, but they will come back again; and when they return their first thought will be of you. Thus, each person in the Church does his share; is it not beautiful? The priests who minister and teach, like you, with the boys, receive the love of the people they serve in their counselling of wisdom, aiding the poor, nursing the sick, and to the dying carrying a gracious comfort; the bishops, men chosen for the work to which they are called, each in his own diocese, guard and watch over all the priests; the archbishops, men of exalted station, watch over the bishops and administer the affairs of the Church for many dioceses; the cardinals, those great men at Rome, the Christian capital of the world, govern the greatest affairs of the Church. And over them all, and over us all, before whom you and I are as nothing, is the Pontiff, the great sovereign Pope, the Vicar of Christ on the earth.

"Joaquín, he has written to me, even to me, the humblest bishop in all the world, asking why the faith is so cold in my diocese, saying the people contribute scarcely at all to the work of the Church. In times past the Church was so powerful that it did not have to

solicit support, and could force people to live as they should. Some by evil counsels have been led astray, and through their strayings evil men have stripped and are stripping the Church of her rights; yes, even the city of Rome, which was hers, has been lately taken from her. But this will not always be so; the right in the end must be triumphant. Evil besets us now on every hand, the heathen cry out against us, evil-minded men, high in the councils of many nations, conspire for her undoing. Joaquín, the Church must have money to maintain her works and her rights. Join with us now, dedicate your life to her and her service. Ambition's fullest desires could not ask more than the rewards she has to give, in her is the power supreme. Learn to love her as I love her now, and the rewards and the praises of the Church so much beloved will rest sweet on the soul."

The bishop's eyes burned hot with his zeal, but my heart told me that if Padre Tomás, merely to gain praise from others, would lie, would not the bishop, good man though he was, say anything, promise anything, if it would help the Church he so devoutly loved? I could not trust them; my vow to José must remain unbroken, and my lips were sealed to him.

"The poor cry out in their sorrows, the heathen die with none by them to bring holy ministrations, and the Church begs for help in her struggle with evil men who would be her undoing. You know of great riches hid in the woods where no man may use them; and have you nothing to say, Joaquín?"

My eyes were fixed on the ground, a mask of silence was over my features, a vacant expression, a set look

which an Indian assumes when he has resolved to tell nothing.

"Joaquín," the bishop cried, "you must answer. Don Ignacio sends word that if you will make known this secret he will administer the lands, protect the Church in her ancient rights and will protect you and your father José. Don Ignacio is a good man. What more could you ask?"

If I had wavered before my mind and my lips were now set against them. The secret they should never know, because Don Ignacio worked with them.

For a long time the bishop talked to me, and through it all I listened and gave him respectful attention as was my duty, but I did not answer, till finally in anger he said:

"Joaquín, your silence is insolent. I command that you answer me."

To this I replied, "What is mine to give I could give you; what is mine to tell I could tell you; that which is of another is not mine to give or mine to tell. More I cannot answer."

The bishop touched a bell on his table, and Padre Tomás, who, I suspect, had been all the time listening, came into the room, other men coming with him.

"Tomás, it is as you said; words can do nothing."

"Then, your Señoría, leave him to us. We can persuade him," one of the men said, and Padre Tomás looked his assent, though saying nothing.

"Oh, I do not like that," and the bishop rested his head on his hand, a weary look in his eyes, while he intently studied my face.

"Your Señoría, let not a tender heart stand in the

way of your duty. Let us take the young man. We can persuade him."

"No, no, he will listen to reason," and the bishop's face, as he said this, looked anxiously troubled.

"An Indian will not reason, your Señoría," said Padre Tomás. "Acts are better than words. Time passes. What is done must be done at once, for word of this treasure has gone through the city. Soon others will be filing claims and make complications. Let us have him. We can use gentle persuasions."

"This is your word?" and the bishop looked at the men intently.

"That is our word. We will use only gentle persuasions."

For a moment the bishop sat thinking, then taking a pen, wrote the following, and read it to me:

"We, Teófilo, Bishop of St. Joseph's, deliver Joaquín Buenevento to our well-beloved Padre Tomás, directing that the person now delivered be judiciously punished, till he, remembering his duties and obligations as an attendant in the School of St. Joseph and the authority which we have over him and over all who serve the Church in our diocese, repents the rebellious spirit this day manifested before us, and imparts such information regarding our lands as may be required from him. Given under our episcopal authority.'" The bishop signed the paper and said to the men, "I hold you to strict account, that you use nothing but gentle persuasions."

Then he sealed the paper. My attention was riveted on him and I did not notice that one of the men had crept softly behind me. No realization of danger came

to me till a plaited horsehair rope was thrown over my shoulders, binding my arms to my sides, and I was a prisoner. Before I could act, I was bound hand and foot, and at their mercy, and my eyes told me that these were not merciful men.

"Joaquín," the bishop said, his voice trembling with emotion, "I ask you once more, you who are in the Church's service, do you deny her authority? The secrets you hold relate to our lands."

Indian eyes, burning defiance, gave my answer. Words were unnecessary.

Then the bishop wrote on the paper, "The final question was asked. The youth, though bound, is still defiant. We can do nothing. Let the punishment be carried out." The men attested in witness, and the warrant was handed to them.

The bishop made the sign of the cross over my head and invoked my patron saint, and petitioned the Virgin to bring me comfort and give me a right spirit that my sufferings might not long endure. Then standing erect, he said, "Tomás, remain by this youth and personally attend him till his spirit is chastened, and he is made loyal to the duty he owes to the Church which he is now serving as an attendant. We hold you strictly, that the authority is not transgressed. See to it that the means used are gentle persuasions."

CHAPTER XIX

GENTLE PERSUASIONS

THE bishop left us, and my captors, seizing my arms, dragged me away. Across the great courtyard we went, now deserted and silent. Padre Tomás, continually mumbling a prayer, walked by me, and we entered the passageway which led down to the dungeon. A chill dampness came creeping about me. The heavy door was swung back, rats scampered away at our coming, and bats, disturbed in their rest, went circling about us in their swift flight.

Padre Tomás stood close by my side and whispered, "I am always here by you. One word and they stop. What you hide belongs to the Church. Her you are serving, enrolled as one of her attendants. You must obey your bishop. If you meant not to obey, why did you take service with us?"

"I knew not what I did," I answered, "and though you murder me here, no word will I yield."

"You'll soon change your boasting. In an hour we'll have you pleading for mercy," said the leader to me while his men were busy setting up the post which I had seen and which the frightened boy had so much dreaded. Now it was ready and the men started to drag me toward it, and I scornfully allowed my feet to be placed in the rings and my hands to be drawn up

toward the cross bar. My clothes were cut from me. My nakedness my captors insulted. My rage grew to that of a demon, and madness lent strength to my arms. Then the light lash was brought, and the two men laid hold on the ropes to stretch up my body, laughing and jeering as though they enjoyed it. But their purpose was unaccomplished. With one mighty effort I pulled my arms down, and as they clung to the ropes, I hauled them both up, and try as they would, they could not stretch my body at all. The leader laughed at my efforts. He knew I could not exert my strength for long, and already the ropes were cutting my wrists, my hands growing numb from the binding. Then when he had laughed and abused his assistants for their poor strength, while he urged them to still greater efforts, he brought the lash across my back with a smart stinging cut that set the nerves trembling.

Padre Tomás came closer and said, "Joaquín, do you yield?"

A curse was the only answer I gave him.

Without waiting to hear any more, the leader rained cuts and blows over my naked body, sparing no part of it, and particularly striking me under the armpits, that I might more readily give to the stretching. Sting, sting, my muscles were yielding to the cutting lash; a frenzy of pain came surging over me. I felt my body drawn out. I could not resist it, and the sharp little lash now touched the tight-drawn skin like a knife. I tugged at my fastenings. Froth came on my lips, and wild shriekings and frenzied curses at my tormentors resounded through the dungeon with the crack of the lash.

After what seemed like an eternity, my tormentors paused, panting from the effort. The ropes which held my arms relaxed, and moaning, I sank down, and, with my feet bound to the floor, was forced to cling to the post in an agony of pain.

Padre Tomás came to me again, and said, "Joaquín, do you yield? Will you be an obedient son to the Church, in whose service you are?"

Once more I cursed him, and looking defiance at my tormentors, closed my lips and waited their pleasure.

"Come get ready," one of them said; "stretch him well this time, and we'll see how the Indian devil can stand it. God and the saints! he is as strong as a bull!"

"Yes," replied another, "and unless we break his strength here, he may serve us a turn when he is free. Come, *compañeros*, string him up!"

Padre Tomás now protested, saying, "No, the orders are that only gentle means must be used. The bishop has given no license to torture, and it has been ruled that to stretch a man a second time after the body has fallen exhausted is torture. We must use gentle means. In time he will yield."

"Yes, and leave the Indian devil unharmed to hunt us for ever! Come, *compañeros*, string him up."

"At your peril," said the padre, advancing, and the priest faced four determined men. Truly, this man may be respected, thought I; here he is brave, though in the woods he's a coward. Then I reflected that he knew the men dared not harm him.

After awhile I somewhat recovered my strength, and could stand on my feet. I leaned heavily against the

post, my breath coming fast, my heart pulsating, a nervous trembling and quivering attesting my sufferings; yet, no harm had been done, though the blows of the lash smarted all over my body.

Padre Tomás called the men aside, and in whispered conversation made some plan that seemed to please them. What it might be I did not hear, but the name of José was mentioned, and whom they meant I could not understand.

Presently Padre Tomás said, "I must go and report to the bishop," and I feared that my greatest trial was at hand. My body quivered in terror, but my spirit was strong, and I made no sign of yielding, though four human devils stood at one side whispering and grinning.

I heard the door open, swing back on its hinges, and close again softly. Padre Tomás had gone. I shut my eyes, expecting each instant to feel the keen lash and the cruel dragging ropes, but no one moved. What would be the next torture? I opened my eyes, and to my astonishment found I was alone.

Time passed, and finally the padre came back with a draught of cool water, saying that the bishop had sent it, with a blessing and a prayer that my punishment might lead me to peace and obedience. After this the men came back, and there was more whispering together. Again I heard the padre say that the bishop forbade it, that gentle means must be used, and even in my hatred my heart turned somewhat toward the bishop.

"And as to our plans for the Indian, José," I heard Padre Tomás continue, "the bishop says we have no

authority over him, and may not wrest his secret from him."

"José, my father José, coming here!" I cried.

"Yes, to see you, and a sorry sight he will find," said Padre Tomás.

"Consider again, padre," the leader urged. "We will do it. The job is too easy! José will come here to see Joaquín, and we will make him a prisoner. All you do is to lend us your dungeon, we do the work. What is an Indian to you?"

Then, in my hatred and scorn, I saw that the padre was yielding. "Surrender José to those men to be tortured?" I cried. "Have a care what you do, Padre Tomás."

"No insolence, boy! I consult not you." But he continued in a more quiet voice, "Look you, Joaquín. Yield now, and let him meet you with pride. He is overpleased that you are to become a priest."

"Padre Tomás, you lie." The words had escaped me; I could not recall them, and yet I was sure he was lying. 'Twas but a poor trick to make me, weakened by sufferings, yield to his wishes.

"Lie, do I?" and the priest's face turned purple. "Lie, do I? Wait; you shall see. Men, I grant you the second dungeon."

Would they take José in there? Should I yield? Then I laughed aloud. "José coming indeed," I said, and in scorn laughed again.

"In truth he is," Padre Tomás replied. "He was coming with me, but stopped for a short time with some Indians who live on the lower lagoon, and was to come to the city this morning. Hark, there is a summons

at the door of the courtyard; perhaps it is he," and the padre, with my tormentors, went out to see who had come.

My blood ran cold in my veins. I heard some one coming down the steps of the dungeon and thought I heard José's voice, and then Padre Tomás saying, "Yes, it is a curious way to go into the church, but it was made long ago that one might be secure going in and coming out. As we found it, so we have kept it."

"Liar!" I shouted. "José, my father, fly from them. They are taking you prisoner to torture you and make you tell of your rubber." This I said in my own Indian tongue, still doubting that José had come.

My horror started cold sweat over my body. Yes, it must be José's voice, surprised, and saying in our own language, "Joaquín, are you there?"

"Ay, José, and to be tortured till I yield up your secret. Father, fly and bring help to me."

I heard the sounds of a struggle prolonged for a moment, though it seemed like an hour, then some one fell heavily, and my heart almost burst as I heard José cursing his captors. He cursed as only an Indian can curse, and in our own language. Shrieking, now half crazed, I tugged at my bonds, then called for help, then laughed and shrieked again, and quivering even into my heart, remained quiet and listened.

The dungeon was opened. I heard my tormentors' voices. I heard José hurling curses and defiances at them. Padre Tomás came softly in, like a spectre in black, and stood at my side. "Joaquín, do you yield? It will soon be too late."

His voice was drowned in a piercing shriek, prolonged,

reverberating, repeated again; and then a sickening smell of burning flesh filled all the dungeon. At times the shrieks were repeated, curses too, and words of defiance. José would never yield to them. Cold sweat was all over me, my heart stopped beating, blood oozed from the smarting spots where the lash had tormented my skin. Now shriek after shriek rent the air, gurgling sounds, laboured breathings and shriekings again.

"Joaquín, they may kill him. Do you yield?" I heard Padre Tomás saying. A wild cry resounded through the dungeon, José's voice mingled with shriekings, pleadings for mercy, and the sickening smell of burning flesh was increasing about me.

I heard gasping words say, "Joaquín, tell them! Tell them, Joaquín!" — gaspings and sobbing breaths followed. "Tell them, Joaquín! My mind wanders, I cannot bear more," and the voice grew fainter.

"Padre Tomás, I yield," I cried out. "Save José! Save José!"

"He yields," the priest joyfully shouted. "Give José relief." Then a gasping voice came again, "Tell them, Joaquín," and all was still, only occasional laboured breathings by which I knew that José was alive.

Padre Tomás lighted a taper. The flickering light struggled an instant as if fearing to illumine the dark scene, — a dungeon dirty with age, a naked Indian chained to a post, rats, with shining eyes, peeping from their retreats, and the priest, pencil and paper in hand. The silence was broken only by the sobbed breathing from the next dungeon.

Quickly my secret was told. Padre Tomás noted it

all, and I was released. With an impulse of love for my foster-father, I made one long bound for the door, naked as I was. In three steps I was out of the dungeon and made for the next entrance, bent on rescuing José.

What was this met my gaze? A group of priests and men before the second dungeon laughing and making sport of the scene. Don Ignacio, covered with dust, was mimicking José's voice, my father José's voice. Just then the men brought out from the dungeon a dead pig which they had tortured to make the wild shriekings. I was a traitor.

Before me confused masses of people appeared. My senses reeled, my knees trembled beneath me. I sank to the ground moaning, laughing, and grovelling, digging my nails into the bricks till the blood started.

I heard Don Ignacio's voice shouting, "Here, be quick, he will be up in a frenzy to work death among us! Bind his arms! My God, bind his arms! See, he is getting up now!"

Truly Don Ignacio had spoken in time. My strength was returning as they fell on me, and bound me fast, preventing my vengeance.

Angry curses formed on my lips, but intelligent words were beyond my control. Bending over me, some priests placed my quivering form on a stretcher, tenderly trying to sooth me as they did so. Kindness, such kindness, — cruelty, such refined cruelty, — how could I fathom its meaning? They started carrying me up to my own room in the little boy's quarters, when with sudden energy I sat up in my litter and shouted, "The pig, the pig, bring me the pig! I must have it!" I know they brought it to me, and as they bore me away,

I fondled it as well as I could, although my arms were bound, and it distressed me that I could not hold the pig securely. This I remember, but what I did the rest of that day and that night is all a blank; I cannot recall it. Perhaps I slept, perhaps I held the pig in my arms till the morning. This, I know, when I came to myself, the sun was streaming in through the iron-bound windows, and I found myself on the floor, a dead pig close by my side.

CHAPTER XX

THE COURT OF FIRST INSTANCE

ALL the horror of the previous night came to me again. My heart swelled up in one mighty pulsation, there was a sinking feeling in my stomach. I sat down, closed my eyes for a few moments, and was calm, and I was old too. Every boyish feeling had left me for ever. Going to my door, I found it securely locked and barred. Cool water was always at hand in a great clay jar in each room, and I now drank greedily, and then sat down to consider what I would do and how I should act.

This much I was resolved, I was done with the school and done with the Church. But how to get away from them? My first thought was to use force, then I remembered their power. I would make myself humble and wait my chance to escape. As I sat considering, a light tapping on the door called my attention. The lock was turned softly and the old priest who taught us doctrine stood before me.

"Son, the morning's calm be with you, the peace of God and the Virgin's blessing be on you. Harken, the bells are calling that we come to mass. If your body is still weary, lean on me, my son; though I am old, yet I can support you." Noting that I turned my face

from him, he came close to me, and kneeling at my side, whispered, "What we suffer we suffer for God, by whom all things are ordered, and even though men in the Church may do wrong," and here his voice was scarce to be heard, "it is the men, not the Church. It is God's Church, God and the Virgin's. Come, Joaquín, the bells call us to mass."

How I despised the mass and everything with which the Church was connected. But here was a chance to escape.

"Father," I said, "my body is heavy with pain, yet if you will help me to rise and arrange my gown somewhat, I will go with you."

With eager hands he lent me his aid. I, pretending, gave movements to indicate my distress, but my mind was now calm and my one thought was to escape. Bending low, I hung on his arm, and together we walked to the church, where to outward appearance I humbly knelt and murmured a prayer. They did not know the curses that I, under my breath, uttered against them.

The priests saw my humble behaviour and were rejoiced. The bishop came in and saw me, and stopping where I was kneeling, gave me his blessing; and in my heart I cursed him, though to outward appearance I humbled myself. "A blessing, truly a blessing has been this chastisement," he said. "'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,' and whom the Church loves she must chasten. Some would deny the Church all her rights to punish; yet see the results, how blessed. The rebellious man is on his knees before God. May the Virgin look down on him and bless him," and the bishop

went on his way to the chancel to take part in the service.

To me it was of little moment. I gave no heed to the mass; my thoughts were all on my escape. Yet I knew I was watched, and that they would detain me by force if need be. When the service was over I went out again with the old priest. The bishop, too, walked beside me. In the courtyard the tropical sun shone with splendour, and burned with heat where it touched, though as yet the air was cool and the breath of the night seemed lingering about it.

"Padre," I said, "my body is tired; let me stay here. We Indians love to be in the sun, even though it is hot."

He could not but consent, and we sat in the courtyard together. As the sun rose higher, the heat became more intense and the old priest began to suffer. I saw this and was glad.

"Let us come in the shade now, my son," he said.

"No, padre, the sun is good to my body. Go you to the shade, but allow me to stay here."

A little while longer he tarried, but seeing how listlessly I sat, my head and shoulders drooping, he moved himself a little, and then still further, till he found a cool shady place, where he sat watching me all the time.

I thought to escape now, but two men were keeping guard at the door, and I knew the old priest was watching; it was useless. First one, then another, and then a third hour passed, when there came a commotion at the outer door. A man entered bearing a letter and paper addressed to the bishop. I thought something was coming, some trouble; perhaps the civil authorities

were going to help me, for the story of yesterday's doings must now be abroad through all the city.


Word was sent to the bishop, who came immediately, received the letter and paper, examined them carefully, and with a long drawn breath expressed his satisfaction. Then he said, "It is well. Cleverly done, very cleverly done. Call Padre Tomás and let him see this paper."

The summons was quickly obeyed. Padre Tomás expressed his delight, and then broadly hinted that the Church must have some reward for one who had served as he had served.

"Yes, Tomás, the Church will ever be mindful of you," the bishop said. "You deserve a reward and shall have it; a high place shall be yours."

To my surprise, I found that they now gave little heed to me, and it was evident that I might do as I pleased. That paper meant something, I could not tell what. Rising, I walked to the door of the courtyard and looked out on the street. My first impulse was to run, but none hindered my going, so why should I make such effort? Hesitating I stood, and the old priest, seeing it, came to me and said, "During vacation one may go out and come in as he will. If you think a little diversion would be a relief to you, go out for a time, and come to us again for *almuerzo*, or later even if you should fancy."

I, who but a short time before had been closely guarded, was free. Something had happened, of that I was sure, yet had no idea what it could be. Rage burned in my heart, but in my mind all was clear and determined. To that school I would never return, nor



did I look back to see it again. To me it was a blot on the past.

To Rios y Compañía, the merchants friendly to me, and with whom I had become fairly intimate, I went to tell what had happened, and to ask their advice. I was kindly received, and when the account of how my secret had been wrung from me was known, Señor Rios said he thought I had done wrong not to tell him of such great wealth, and for myself I knew it would have been better.

"What a pity you did not hold out," he said to me. "They would not have dared chastise you a second time."

"I would have held out for ever, even to death," I replied, "but I thought I heard my father José's voice. I did not know that Don Ignacio was in the city, I did not expect to hear my own language, my body and mind were in a ferment and confusion of rage. I was caught unawares, that was all; I was trapped."

"Next year, when you are through school, come to us."

"Next year? Now, this day if you will; I shall never go back to that school again."

"I am afraid you will have to go."

"I will not. Why should I go back?"

"Because you are officially recorded as a student and an attendant; as a student sent by your father, and an attendant by your own consent,—an appointment accepted by you and formally signed by the bishop. These papers were recorded when they took out a title for the lands where your rubber is growing. The papers and titles were sent to the bishop this morning."

"The devils," I said; "that is why they held me a prisoner. I saw them get the papers, and then I was free."

"If only we could have found you. The titles were called out in court, and any one having a previous claim was told to come and present it. The court waited an hour, but nobody came, and now it is done."

"Had I but known! What a great thing it is to have knowledge!" I was sad, but my head was not bowed, and my heart was determined.

"But I need not go back to the school?" I said, and looked at him questioningly.

"You must. Let me explain," Señor Rios said, as he took up a book of the laws of the Republic, and showed me the rights guaranteed to the Church, among them powers which could compel attendance on the studies and duties which I had engaged to perform.

"Your father has authorized this," Señor Rios continued; "from him the Church now holds authority."

"Not so, my father has not given me to them. José is not my father."

"No? Who is your father?"

"I have none," I said slowly, measuring my words. "I am a natural son of Don Ignacio."

Silence followed my declaration. Yet natural sons were too common to cause much comment. Every man had from one to a score or even more of them, a condition so common that there was no disgrace attached.

"And do you wish to claim Don Ignacio as your father?" Señor Rios asked.

"Not I. Let no man know this."

"We have no love for Don Ignacio. Here your secret is safe."

An old man in the office, who had heard our conversation, now rose suddenly, saying, "I will defend the boy. Come with me to the courts. I will make you free."

"Take care, Doctor Zacate," Señor Rios exclaimed, "the Church is now in power and grows stronger each day."

"They know me, and I know them. The time will come when we will stretch the neck of every priest in the country,—the devils. Come, boy. I hear they call you Joaquín; that is my name, Joaquín Zacate, doctor of laws, and chief of the Liberal party in this State."

I required no second summons, and though Señor Rios warned him again, we set out at once. Hope, which I had not known for hours, leaped again in my heart.

"We must be quick; the court will close soon. Now tell me all your story."

I told him without reserve.

"Do you wish to claim Don Ignacio as your father?"

"Claim him as my father? I would prefer the devil should be my parent."

"Well spoken, boy. We will make a Liberal of you. Strong arms and hot blood, these can fight our battles. Here we are. Your name is Joaquín, and I believe they call you Buenevento. Well, it is good enough, we will make it a 'good event,' and make it hot enough for them if I am not mistaken."

Entering the court, we found ourselves in a long room, at one end of which the judge was sitting examining papers. At one side by the wall three clerks at separate tables were busy filing documents and making records. There was no ceremony here. Doctor Zacate walked up to the judge, who, raising his eyes without moving, said, "Wait a moment," and then went on with his writing. One of the clerks brought two chairs, and we sat waiting till he would hear us.

"Secretario," said the judge to the principal clerk, "take this paper and have it recorded. Now, Doctor Zacate," and the judge waited to hear him.

The doctor began at once.

"The plea of Joaquín Buenevento, an Indian in the city and district of Cartagena, before the Judge of First Instance.

"Petitioner claims himself to be aggrieved and injured by the Church and School of St. Joseph, and prays release from any and all obligations claimed to be due the parties, or which these parties may claim as their due from your petitioner.

"Petitioner avers, states, and makes oath,

"First. That according to the Indian laws in which he has been brought up, he is of full age, having more than passed a man's stature.

"Note A. In accordance with the laws of the Republic, it will be found that privileges of retaining their own customs have been granted to the Indians.

"Second. Being of full age, your petitioner claims the right to act for himself.

"Third. Your petitioner is of unknown parentage and is responsible to no persons other than himself.

“ Fourth. Your petitioner states that he of his own efforts provided the means for his tuition and maintenance at the School of St. Joseph.

“ Fifth. Your petitioner states that the value of such maintenance has been duly paid and received by the Church and School of St. Joseph, and that your petitioner claims no part of it again.

“ Sixth. Your petitioner acknowledges that he accepted an appointment as an attendant in the Church and School of St. Joseph, but now claims to have served all the term of that appointment in faithful duty, and that no appointment was made or accepted for the ensuing year.

“ Finally, your petitioner finds that his best interests require that he now leave the Church to pursue studies in commercial affairs, for which an opportunity has come to him; and he now petitions and makes known his plea before this honourable Court of First Instance that he is aggrieved and injured by the Church and School of St. Joseph, in that they attempt to require his attendance and service as an intern-attendant during the coming session, which he, being of full age according to the laws of the Indians and therefore free to act for himself, declines to do. Your petitioner prays this honourable Court of First Instance that he be allowed to pursue his own will as a citizen of a free Republic, and denies for himself and in his own behalf any claims which the Church and School of St. Joseph may make for his services, such services having been given without compensation, and all dues having been truly paid to the Church and School of St. Joseph, of which payment your petitioner claims no part again; and your petitioner

affirms that the Church and School of St. Joseph are thereby fully compensated and that your petitioner owes them no service at all."

While Doctor Zacate had been slowly dictating this plea a clerk had been recording it, and the document was now laid before the judge, who examined it carefully.

Motioning to a second clerk, the judge asked me several questions, the clerk noting my answers. He wanted particularly to know how I had obtained the money to provide my maintenance at school, whether formal authority had been given to José, my tribal father, whether any formal authority had been given to any priest, and whether it was really my wish to undertake commercial, rather than classical studies. My answers seemed satisfactory, and the judge asked Doctor Zacate if he wished to add anything to the petition, and was answered in the negative.

The judge handed the papers to the first clerk, shook hands with Doctor Zacate, and set to work arranging his papers to close the morning session as we went over to the table occupied by the first clerk. Here Doctor Zacate paid the fees and the petition was duly signed and sealed, and a notice was drawn up calling upon the Church and School of St. Joseph to answer if they claimed the right to hold me as an intern in their school during the coming year.

This was all. We shook hands with the clerk and went out. I had expected a scene very different. I thought my rights would be argued and my sufferings would be made known. The paper seemed reasonable enough, but I was after all disappointed. For a time

we walked in silence, then I asked, "Doctor, when will we go again to the courts?"

"When the Church answers your petition. We can add nothing more to our case; it must stand as we have written it. The Church will file its answer, and after that we will make arguments, I for your contention, another lawyer for their contention, and we will send evidence. This will be sworn to before a notary, and our arguments will be presented in writing along with the evidence. This afternoon the Church will file its answer and the clerk will send us a copy, or it may be that the judge will reject your petition and bid you serve the Church for another year; I think not, however. You did wisely, very wisely indeed. If you had shown anger, the judge would have listened to a plea from the Church that its discipline was what you most needed, but when you asked for the right to continue a course of commercial training, the Judge could not help hearing your plea. Let that rest now," and leaning toward me, Doctor Zacate whispered, "Like you, I hate the Church. Come to my house outside the walls and I can tell you how to get your revenge, and will make you one of us, a Liberal, bent on freeing this beautiful Republic from the contemptuous yoke of the Church."

CHAPTER XXI

THE DECISION

I WAS glad to go with Doctor Zacate. His intense energy and keen perception held me, his white hair and bristling iron-gray beard, shaggy eyebrows and restless penetrating eyes fascinated me, though his thin, avaricious lips and the cruel lines of his mouth might have repelled, rather than attracted.

We shortly reached the little town beyond the walls of the city, and were before his house. A well-worn copper plate bearing the inscription, Doctor Joaquín Zacate, Abogado, adorned a heavy Spanish door barring the great entrance. Through the larger door the customary little door had been cut which served for ordinary occasions, the great door usually remaining closed. Doctor Zacate tapped smartly, and immediately a negro boy unbarred the locks and let us in.

"Wine and cigarettes," said Doctor Zacate, not noticing the boy, who immediately scurried away to fill his master's order. The impatient rule of an old martinet was everywhere apparent, and order was precise, a rare condition in any Spanish house of that country. On the shady side of the courtyard or *patio* were chairs and a table, flowers and palm-trees grown in earthen pots were luxuriantly and tastefully grouped

in the centre, rare orchids grew unrestrained in the shade, and a number of birds with bright plumage, imprisoned by mutilated wings, were free to move about as they would. The place was attractive, and evidently Doctor Zacate had means enough at least to maintain a house abundantly well appointed. We seated ourselves at the table, and then red wine, rum and cigarettes were brought us.

"All you Indians drink. That is the pest with you," Doctor Zacate said briskly.

"We drink, yes. Why not?"

"Because he who drinks too much must always be useless."

"But the Indians are useless. We enjoy what we can and whenever we can, else our masters would take all from us."

"And if you have something to do, you still drink?"

"Most of us do."

"Well, now you can drink your fill," he said. "You must fight the Church, but what matter? Get as drunk as an Indian can, and sleep it off in the cool of this courtyard."

"Doctor Zacate, I pledge you your health, and I swear to you my gratitude," and I drained a glass of rum to its last, "but," I continued, "more than this I do not take."

He pledged me in return, taking red wine with water, then urged me to take more. What could it matter to any Indian, he said, how his affairs might be damaged so long as he could drink. I refused, nor could I understand why he should thus urge me and put rum close at my hand where I could easily take it.

At last he said, "Then you can be trusted not to drink if the occasion requires?"

"Yes, doctor," I said, "of that you can be assured."

"I believe it," and Doctor Zacate stood up in excitement, saying, "I have found the right man at last. Joaquín, do you know what fear is?"

"I know danger and like to combat it."

"Correct," and Doctor Zacate brought his fist down on the table, making the bottles and glasses rattle together. Then, punctuating his remarks with the long bony central finger of his left hand, and vehemently punching the table while he talked, he gave me a long account of the Liberal party and their struggles to break the Church's power. He told me how in the earlier days the Church had all the power, and judged and punished with fearful torture whomsoever it would, and how, little by little, that power had been and was being undermined. Then he gave me the history of the wars to obtain independence from Spain, and the subsequent wars of contention for power in the new republics; those called Conservatives struggling to conserve the old régime and the power of the Church; those called Liberals struggling for the most radical liberties, all that socialists might reasonably demand.

I listened intently, calm in my hate, because my feelings against my late oppressors were too deep for any expression, and I now pledged Doctor Zacate my hand and my life in the cause of the Liberals.

"Enough, I believe you. Now listen carefully," and bending toward me, he said, "a rising is at hand. A few short weeks and there will be blood in the country. Whether we win, or whether we lose, the gathering

strength of the Church will be checked. Are you with us? ”

“ Yes, to the end,” I answered.

“ You will have a high post in our army, for you are made to fight, but of this later. For the present my plan is as follows: I will defend your suit, and we will win it. Then I will send you a heavy account of charges for my services, though in truth I work for you, not for money, but this bill can serve our purpose. You must question the charges, and call them excessive. I will be insulted, and call you hard names, you in kind replying. To all outward appearances we will be implacable enemies. You can curse me by day, and meet me by night, and none will suspect we are working together.”

This was stratagem equal to that any Indian could plan, and I gave a respectful assent, and told him I would do my part well. A late *almuerzo* was served, and after that we rested awhile, Doctor Zacate at times pacing the courtyard, thinking and planning.

An hour or more passed, and a sharp rap at the entrance signalled a visit. The negro boy opened the door and a court messenger handed Doctor Zacate a paper, the answer made by the Church to my plea; surely the courts in our country are swift in dealing out justice. Doctor Zacate acknowledged receiving the paper, read it rapidly, then said, “ The devils! This is easy. They claim Joaquín Buenevento enters into voluntary service to them, authorized thereto by his father, of which authorization the Reverend Father Tomás is custodian in trust, and they therefore demand the personal service of Joaquín Buenevento for the ensuing year.”

With a rapid hand Doctor Zacate wrote on the paper: "Your petitioner, Joaquín Buenevento, denies all the statements made by the Church; denies that his father made any such authorization, denies that he has any known father, denies for himself that he has accepted to serve the Church for the coming year, and denies that the Reverend Father Tomás or any other person whatsoever has been appointed custodian in trust for his person; and respectfully petitions that the Church authorities establish their demands for his service by showing the documents which will prove what they allege."

We went to a notary, my oath was taken, the paper was sealed, and the court messenger started with it at once. Perhaps the judge would give his decision in an hour or two, perhaps longer time might be required. If the case were obscure he might call some lawyers to help him decide it, but at the most the decision would not be long delayed.

"Now to business," said Doctor Zacate. "Come in here," and we went into a house near at hand.

"Tell Señor Romero that I have important matters to discuss relating to his case in the Superior Court."

Presently we were asked to come to the salon. There we found a portly man waiting us, in whose face I detected at once the signs of negro blood and so held myself somewhat reserved. This was not noticed, however, and my new friends now left me and went to one end of the room, where they held earnest conversation. Then Señor Romero gave me a letter addressed to the commercial house where I had made my first friendships

and courteously asked me to take it to them, and Doctor Zacate told me to meet him there on the morrow.

I was rather anxious to go back to my friends and made all haste to the house of Rios y Compañia. Here I was well received. The letter I carried was carefully examined in private and then destroyed, and they told me that I might stay and work with them at a modest salary, but sufficient to support a plain existence. I accepted at once and was told to find a small house where I might live, their recommendation being that I should locate near the landing from the lagoons outside the city, because there the produce would come in and there I would be most of the time engaged at my work.

To find a small house, or rather a hut of two rooms and an outdoor kitchen, was not difficult. There were plenty down by the landing beyond the walls of the city, and I soon found one which seemed best suited to me and the means at my commands. The next morning I immediately began to search for a young woman to keep the house and cook for me. I could pride myself on my vigorous strength and pleasing appearance, and the women of the peon classes were eager to serve me. In a few hours the house had been fully arranged with modest furnishings, and I had installed a fine young woman to take care of it and of me.

This was life again, and here I was free. How I hated the remembrance of the restraint at the School of St. Joseph. At the landing people were busy at work handling all kinds of produce; on the yellow sand of the beach half-breed children and little negroes played and were happy together. Overhead in the intense azure sky, groups of buzzards appeared black in

sharp outline against the light, as they lazily flew around, gradually rising or slowly descending.

Our house was made without much care; simply posts driven into the ground, with wattlings nailed to them, forming a rude latticework over which red clay and mud had been plastered, and the roof was thatched with giant palm leaves. A table, two or three chairs, plates, cups, knives, forks, spoons, a cot bed in my room, another in the room where my woman would sleep, and two *toldas* to keep out the mosquitoes, was all the furnishings it contained. Back of the house was a little shed, where, upon a rough table, plastered with clay to protect it from fire, stood the oven, a rough dome of clay, and two open hearths of clay, over which pots and kettles might be set for cooking.

These were all our possessions, and yet not paid for; still they were ours. The wild breath of freedom leaped in my nostrils, the woman standing beside me was mine. My broken faith with José was my only shadow, yet why should I be sad? I had found new friends, I had learned how to read and to write, I was overquick with figures and calculations, work had been found, the future was all sunshine before me. The past I could easily forget, and José would not want; the half of all I earned would be his.

For a little time in the morning I stopped at the house, and my woman cooked some fish and plantain, which we ate together, she promising better things for the evening. Then I went to the mercantile house to report for my duties, and to see Doctor Zacate.

There I found him, waiting impatiently for me. "Ha, here he comes at last. Young blood and a young

woman, I'll warrant, is what caused his delay; but never mind, all young men who have mettle and courage are exactly the same. Come, we are called to court; the judge will give his decision."

We hurried at once to the court, I anxious to have my liberty fully confirmed, Doctor Zacate anxious to secure a recruit for the war he was fomenting. On our arrival we found everything exactly as we had seen it on the day before, each clerk in his place, cigarette stumps scattered about on the floor, the musty smell of old papers and stale tobacco smoke burdening the air. A lawyer and his client were presenting the judge a petition, so we sat waiting. They were quickly heard, and the third clerk, ascertaining our business, took word to the judge, who looked up at us with a cold stare and a face without expression. With no other ceremony, he motioned that we come to his table. Chairs were brought and we sat down expectant.

Taking some papers, he began reading with an indifference almost contemptuous, I thought, but now his decision held all my attention. Having recited over my plea, the reading continued, "'The court finds that on the morning of yesterday Joaquín Buenevento sat in the School of St. Joseph, the door being open, the time vacation, during which the intern-attendants are free to go out as they will, but the petitioner made no effort at all to leave. During that time the Church filed the records of those who had engaged themselves as attendants for the coming eleven months term. Among those records is one as follows — "Joaquín Buenevento, intern in the School of St. Joseph, appointed as an attendant and consenting to such ser-

vice, agrees thereto for the coming eleven months term."

" 'The records of the court show that this obligation was called out by the clerk, and he who is now the petitioner in this cause was directed in audible voice to present himself if he made any objections thereto. It is shown that the petitioner in this cause was well able to present himself here at this court, had such been his will, and it is further shown that during the term past he had contently served as an attendant in the School of St. Joseph, and the inference is that he had consented to serve there again, having paid to the Church the amount required for his maintenance during the coming term. The court takes notice that the petitioner has now altered his mind, and wishes to withdraw from his agreement, claiming that no consideration for such agreement exists; but the honour of an appointment as an attendant is to a student an appointment of value, and therefore a consideration, received and to be received by the petitioner. The court therefore decides that Joaquín Buenevento is legally obligated to serve as an intern-attendant at the School of St. Joseph during the coming eleven months, and we recommend him to the godly admonitions and counsels of the good priests and instructors of that institution.'

"Close the case, seal the document and record the decision," continued the judge.

I jumped to my feet, my liberty gone; a black cloud was surely closing about me. Doctor Zacate's hand on my arm stopped me from making a scene. The judge looked up not unkindly and said, "Young man, go to school; that is the best place for you."

"But they tortured me and by trickery stole my secret from me."

"Oh, I dare say," the judge replied. "I was punished at that school years ago and made to tell secrets. Now I have no cause to regret it. Go to school and study your lessons," and with an impatient gesture he gave the papers for record and began to examine another petition.

Mentally stunned, I dropped into a chair. Doctor Zacate was busy writing another petition, which he read, a long document in the legal form of the country, accepting the judge's decision and asking the thirty days which were usually given to allow those adjudged to service to settle their affairs. The judge received the petition, glanced over it, and then said, to a man sitting beyond the table, "The usual thirty days' settlement, have you any objections to enter?"

I saw the man addressed was the old priest, Padre Maximo, who now made answer, "His Señoria the bishop expected this last plea, and makes no objection, provided Joaquín Buenevento agrees that from now till the thirty days shall expire he will attend mass every morning, and each evening will come to me for an hour's instruction and admonition."

"We agree and accept the conditions," said Doctor Zacate.

Padre Maximo, looking well pleased, said, "Joaquín, I will expect you this evening at eight, and will meet you at the door of the church."

"Now that the case is settled," Doctor Zacate said, turning to me, "and you have won thirty days' liberty

and need not go back to school at once, I must ask for my fee. Three hundred dollars, please."

"So much! I cannot pay that," I cried, my voice showing well-feigned anger.

"Oh, your next consignment of rubber can pay it."

The judge looked up with a cynical smile.

"Must I pay it?" I said, turning to him.

"I have no control over that matter," and he busied himself with his papers again.

"But, Doctor Zacate," I said, "I will have no more rubber; the Church has stolen it all away from me."

A dark look came in the face of Padre Maximo, but he said nothing.

"You sneaking Indian," the lawyer exclaimed, "you question what Doctor Zacate charges? No lawyer in the land would serve you for the miserable sum of three hundred dollars."

"You are an extortioner, a cur like them all —" I got no further; a sharp blow across my face silenced my words. Doctor Zacate after he struck me, and while my eyes blazed hot, said, "My clerk will settle with you for this," and with a sneer on his face walked rapidly out of the court.

Had I gone too far, was he really enraged?

Padre Maximo came to my side to say something to me. "I am your prisoner," I said, "but this hour my freedom is my own. To you I say nothing."

CHAPTER XXII

THE LIBERAL PARTY

MY spirit was almost consumed with rage at my baffled hopes, as I hurried to the office of Rios y Compañia to tell them I could work but one short month. To my surprise they took the notice without much concern, paid me the money for the month during which I could serve, and then bade me go and examine a cargo of rubber and detect if I could such pieces as had stones in the centre. This is a common trick of the Spanish rubber-hunters, a round stone being placed where rubber can coagulate about it, and frequently loss is thus occasioned to the purchasers.

On the way I met Padre Maximo, who evidently was anxious to say something to me. "Joaquín, Padre Tomás starts for your village to-night. If you wish to send a letter, he will take it and read José what you write."

"Yes," I said, "I wish to send a letter, and half of some money paid me to-day."

"Then bring it this evening," and Padre Maximo, seeing that I was in no mood to hear more from him, turned again and left me to go on my way.

To detect stones in a cargo of rubber was an easy matter for me, and soon those who owned the lot were

enraged at my success; but I had little fear of them, and finishing my work, went back to Rios y Compañía and reported. There I received a note which I saw was from Doctor Zacate, so going to one side as if I would find more light, I opened it, and to my satisfaction read the following:

“ Beautifully done. After you get through with the frocked devil to-night, come to the back of my house. Before the thirty days have expired, if nothing goes wrong, we will have you away with our army. This letter must be destroyed.

“ JOAQUÍN ZACATE.”

Immediately I tore the letter to bits and cast it to the winds, my expression endeavouring to portray anger.

“ What does he say ? ” asked Señor Rios.

“ Demands his fee, three hundred dollars. Let him demand. I can’t pay it.”

Señor Rios gave me a searching look and seemed satisfied, and I wondered if he could know of our plan.

When the day’s work was done, I returned to my little house, and in the sunset sat with my woman resting. Then she brought me my dinner, and afterwards with pride she brought out some *calillas*, long cheroots she had rolled for me from dried tobacco leaves.

This was comfort and freedom such as I had not known for almost a year, and when the hour of eight approached I cursed the Church which forced me to leave my woman and go to receive instruction. Promising her I would return as soon as I might be permitted, I sought Padre Maximo, and listened im-

patiently to his words of instruction. When he had finished, I asked if I might give my letter and money to Padre Tomás.

"Padre Tomás is to be an assistant to the bishop and has taken the first dignities of his high office. We must send and ask his permission. Kneel to him, Joaquín, and call him Monseigneur; he likes it."

All Indians are crafty dissemblers, and I would do as Padre Maximo told me. Word came that Monseigneur Tomás would see me, and I found him well disposed, sleek, carefully groomed, and with Pablo still in his attendance.

"Monseigneur," I said, dropping on one knee before him. At this he gave me a pompous blessing, and then took my letter and money, saying he was glad to do me this service on the last visit he would make to our village. Humbly thanking him, I asked permission to aid in his service that evening, for he would soon be on his way, travelling by night so as to avoid the heat of the sun on the open lagoon. This he readily granted, and carrying his things and doing humble service for him, I made myself secure in his favour; though he did not see, or perhaps did not notice, how my eyes burned in the night when I saw that Don Ignacio was to be of the party and that a large, well-armed expedition was going with him. I knew their object. Our rubber groves would soon be in their possession, but I took some comfort in the fact that the same expedition would take my money and my promise of loyalty to José. Monseigneur Tomás gave me a fat embrace, blessed me, and with resentment burning in my heart, I, incapable of striking for revenge, watched them depart on their journey.

Finally I set out to find Doctor Zacate, and presently stood at the back of his house. It was not more than a moment before I heard a cautious step, a little door opened, and I found myself in a vacant yard surrounded by a high wall and partitioned off from the house.

"Keep in the shadow and follow," whispered a voice.

I obeyed, and went cautiously around the sides of the yard, a dark figure leading the way, till we came to another door, which my leader quietly opened, and I found myself in Doctor Zacate's stable. Here another man handed me his cloak, which I put on without question, and my guide and I moved on through another door, but not as cautiously as before.

"Can't they see us from yonder high house?" I whispered.

"Yes," said my leader, "but two men, one wearing a cloak, went out to the stables, and two men, one wearing a cloak, have come back. They cannot see over to the empty lot back of the house."

Now we came to a darkened room, and my leader said, "He is here."

I heard Doctor Zacate's voice say, "All are come," and he continued, "Joaquín Buenevento, great things are about to take place in this land. The times are perilous for those who would make this coming movement a final triumph to rid the Republic of the blighting yoke of the priests. Joaquín Buenevento, seven men, tried and true in this cause, are here in this dark room. Do you join us and cast your lot in with these unknown men, their perils and dangers?"

"I cast in my lot."

"Do you hate, and will you always hate the priests?"

"I hate them."

"Do you swear to be true to your companions, even though they are unseen, and accept death as the forfeit should you break your oath?"

"I broke the oath of a man. What use is my oath?" and trembling in my emotions, I scarce could contain myself further.

"Joaquín Buenevento, you did not break the oath of a man; you were tricked, you thought you heard the voice of him to whom you had sworn. Be as true to us as you are to José; swear it, and we are content. We trust your oath."

"I swear it, I swear it."

"Touch separately each of our seven right hands, and on these hands swear that you will never reveal or betray any person or thing in this cause, seen or unseen, and make your oath that if you fail us, you will forfeit your naked body to death, to be stabbed by unseen hands in the dark."

Doctor Zacate gave me his hand, and I swore the oath and the penalty on it; and other hands were placed in mine till seven times I had sworn the oath, and the penalty for its transgression. Then Doctor Zacate said, "Come, sit at this table and hear your instructions." I heard sounds of people seating themselves, and some one took me by the arm and brought me to a seat at the table.

"Now, general, give your commission," I heard Doctor Zacate say.

In grave tones some one began: "Joaquín Buenevento, you are commissioned a Teniente of Rangers. Your duties as lieutenant will be to start in three weeks

for the rendezvous of the Liberal army and there to report to the general in charge and be at his service. With faithfulness and valour you can win distinctions and honours, and when our cause has achieved its final triumph you can regain from the Church all you have lost. Pending the time of your departure, you are to serve in the house of Rios y Compañia, and live in quiet economy so that no attention may be attracted to you. You are to take advantage of your nightly visits to Padre Maximo to see and hear all that they do at the church, especially that you may find out and so inform us, if they suspect that any movement against them is being developed in the Republic. Twice each week, on Monday and Friday nights, you are to report to us here in this room. When the time comes you will be provided with money and instructed where the army is gathering together. Do you accept this commission?"

"I accept it." I could not say more, for my blood was boiling in my heart's excitement. Now I could indeed fight the priests, and though they forced me to listen to their teachings, I could at the same time be working against them. I tried to say more, but the pulsations of my heart stifled the words on my lips.

"We understand," a grave voice whispered from the man sitting next to me, "do not try to explain. Your sufferings at the hands of the Church are greater than those of any one here. Remember what you have suffered, and think how many have suffered and how still many more must suffer from various persecutions unless we rid ourselves of the priests. When the battle comes, be valiant and true."

Then Doctor Zacate said, "It is well. Let Teniente

Buenevento retire now from the council." Some one took my arm, and I was led away, having seen the face of no man in the room. Yet my heart was content. This was a cause I could serve to the bitterest end, and still glory in it.

In the next room I met the same man who had brought me in through the stables. I saw that he was young and strong, and he, taking note of my muscles, seemed pleased with my appearance.

"What rank did they give you?" he whispered.

"A Teniente of Rangers," I answered.

"Good, then we will be *compañeros*."

Across the courtyard we went, I in the long cloak, which I gave to the man in the stables; out through the secret door to the walled open lot, and around this we crept, keeping close in the shadow, till the little door was reached, where we listened cautiously to be sure that no one was passing. Without a word I went out in the street, and in a moment was gone, thinking how two figures, one wearing a cloak, would presently be seen crossing from the stables to the house.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON TO CENTRE RIVER

I RETURNED to my little house, and soon fell asleep, dreaming of war and battles. Next morning I was at work, and my feelings came down to every-day affairs and the usual routine of life. A week went by, and nothing happened. I had made an apparent peace with the Church and was again in their confidence. I even talked to Padre Maximo of entering on my duties as an intern-attendant when the term first began, regretting that I had taken pay for a month's work with Rios y Compañia, and yet all the time suppressed feelings of glowing hatred, characteristic of the Indians, burned in my spirit against the Church.

One night, when Padre Maximo had been more earnest than usual, he told me, when the lesson was finished, that the bishop wished to see me in his study. I went at once, memories of my last visit in those hated rooms surging up in my mind, but on my countenance all was an unmoved calm, the perpetual mask on the face of an Indian.

I knelt to the bishop, received his blessing, and, as was my custom of late, mentally gave him a curse in return while I dutifully waited his command to arise. At his gesture of permission I rose from my knees, and

I now noticed that he looked troubled as he motioned me to a seat, a rare honour. Usually the younger men stood when attending the bishop.

He was silent for a time, resting his head on his hand, then, as if his mind was resolved, he gave my face a searching look, and began: "Joaquín, I fear that trouble is coming and that we may expect a revolt in the country. Wicked men are for ever plotting to undo the Church, though to me their plottings and bloodshed seem more to extort money than for any principle which may be dear to them. Any principle? How can they, who deny even God, have any principle at all? This Doctor Zacate with whom you had a quarrel, have you seen him of late?"

"Sometimes in the streets, your Señoría," I answered, "but I do not salute him. Elsewhere I have not seen him." This was literally true, for the Seven always met in the dark.

"Thank God and the Virgin, Joaquín, that you have been spared from the influence of those wicked men. In time you will know and appreciate that the Church is and always will be your truest friend."

"Your Señoría, what happened seems hard, but I am learning submission."

"Worthily spoken, Joaquín; we will make a strong man of you in the Church. Tell me, what do you hear at Rios y Compañía? They tell me that their place is overstocked with goods and provisions."

"With products from the woods and country farms, your Señoría. I heard them saying that it had now been ten years since we had a revolution, and if one should come, then products would have much higher values

and exchange would go up so high, that they could not pay their foreign debts. They are careful merchants and plan a long way ahead."

"They are not good friends to the Church. You have seen nothing of arms and munitions of war?"

"Nothing, your Señoria. They have only produce in their storehouses." As I said this my heart bounded in triumph as I thought of sundry strange cases, heavy in weight, which to me always had a mysterious appearance.

"Nothing at all like arms and provisions for war?" and the keen eyes of the bishop searched my face as he asked me.

"No, your Señoria, I am sure they have nothing, but Ramón Garcia in his storehouses has rifles and bullets."

"Yes, I know; they are for the government service. But do you hear nothing about strange men coming and going, in the little town beyond the city walls?"

"Nothing, your Señoria."

"But several times you have been seen very late in the streets."

"I am often out late on pleasure, your Señoria," and I hung my head as if ashamed.

"Then you have no news of any kind to tell us?" continued the bishop.

"Nothing, your Señoria; but now that you have asked me, perhaps, if I take more notice, I can find something."

"That is well. Padre Maximo tells us that you are not averse to taking up your work again at the school. A little freedom has not hurt you. Do not come back

when the term begins. Stay out and enjoy your liberty till the full month is up. You may hear important news, which we trust you to tell us."

"I am at your service, your Señoria," I said.

"That is well. We charge you to keep strict watch, especially of any shipments at night from the landing, for we hear that people have been gathering at places up the river which comes into the lagoon."

With this the bishop dismissed me. The night was dark, the rainy season in the interior was almost at an end, and dark clouds ruddy at times with lightning flashes hung over the mountains, but I knew the rain would not come down to the coast.

This was the night I was to report to the Seven, and without waiting I went at once and tapped on the outer wall, the signal that one sought admission. Then I went around to the gate, and was admitted with the same forms, and the same precautions as on my first visit. Presently I stood in the dark room where the Seven were consulting and plotting together. My tidings were quickly told, all in the room listening with breathless attention, and then for the space of almost a full minute there was dead silence.

I heard a soft voice say, "To-morrow we may be discovered. We must act to-night. General, what are your plans?"

"This. Get the morphine, mix it with the wine, let Teniente Buenevento take it down to the landing and see that all the people there get enough to put them to sleep. Call up our people, let the friends fix the police, get the supplies out and on board the canoes, and make the rendezvous up Centre River in the dry land beyond

the swamps so that the army can be concentrated in secret. In a few weeks we will follow along the base of the mountains and burst unannounced on the rich valley of the interior. Let a canoe be sent where our present camp is being prepared and remove the most valuable of our munitions. To-morrow let Teniente Buenevento tell the bishop where this camp is located. Let the government send there and scatter the few who remain, capture a portion of supplies, and find papers telling that our main army is to be concentrated at a camp on the other coast near the road to the capital. The government army will probably be sent to guard that road, and we will have a free hand to make our first camp undisturbed up Centre River."

"Well planned," I heard several say.

Some one now came in the room, and then the general said, "Teniente, here is the wine and the rum. See that all your friends at the landing have enough to sleep soundly, then come back and report."

I went at once to carry out my first orders. It was not a difficult task, for all my friends were eager to drink, and I went from house to house, saying that I had stolen the wine and rum from the school and wanted every one to have a glass with me. A nightcap I called it, to give them pleasant dreams till the morning. The effect was as the general anticipated. Deep sleep reigned at the landing, where revellings were often carried on till nearly morning.

I went back to report and found the outer yard filled with men, each standing well hidden in the shadows cast by the walls. The report was given and I took my place with the others waiting for orders.

After an hour or more some one came in and reported that the police were asleep, though that seemed strange, for, at intervals, we heard the whistles by which one police officer signalled another that all was well, and let the comandante at the cuartel, beyond in the walled city, know that all were awake and at their several posts in the little town. Without further waiting, we all went to Rios y Compañia's storehouse. At times we met police officers stretched out on the ground, and near each of them stood one of our friends, using the police whistle to give and answer the signals that all was well. At the cuartel, the comandante, alert and watchful, heard and noted each signal and was satisfied.

Through all the night determined men worked with unceasing energy till all the stores were removed and placed in our canoes. With muffled oars and paddles cautiously stirring, the expedition, all unobserved, set out on the different routes, some going to the new camp, others seeking the camp which was to be given over to the government soldiers. Still, at the appointed times the police whistles sounded over the city, and the watchful comandante, noting each signal, recorded that all was well.

The wine had not been very heavily drugged, and the police officers now began to awaken, thankful to the friend standing by him, a friend who had treated to a fine drink, and a cool refreshing sleep. No police officer suspected another, and when morning came all reported that no untoward incidents had marred the night, and the comandante finished his record and went home to his well-earned rest.

The day passed listlessly. Part of the time I was half asleep at my work, but when evening came I was alert, and going to the church, I told the bishop my story. The next day, too late to do us any harm, a squad of soldiers marched out of the city bent on attacking the camp. Two days later they came back flushed with victory, and brought with them documents which were immediately given to the authorities. We had the satisfaction of seeing the hurried departure of soldiers sent to help guard the main road to the capital, and thus we knew that the general had accomplished his object. That same day all the storehouses in the outer town were carefully searched, Rios y Compañia receiving particular attention. Nothing was found, and the officials were satisfied that the revolution was being fomented in the western part of the Republic. Events would be rapid now, and the blood in my veins tingled with excitement, but my face became more stolid than ever.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CURSE

THE ending of my month of liberty was now fast approaching, and I was considering various plans of how I would most conveniently make my escape. One afternoon, as I sat before my house watching the sunset, I saw a canoe coming up from the lagoon and making its way to our landing. Evidently in haste, its occupants worked with energy, often looking anxiously at a smaller canoe which seemed to be following, though the distance was very great between them, and the smaller canoe was not being urged on with much effort.

As the larger one came nearer I saw it was Padre Tomás returning from my village. The other canoe was entirely forgotten as I hastened to meet the priest, and ask him for tidings. He had reached the landing, and started violently on seeing me, but replied to my greetings that José had sent word that all was well, regretting that he had lost the rubber-trees, but saying that he was contented with the money I sent, and with the promise of half of my earnings; then Padre Tomás hurried away.

Joy filled my heart, and my mind was in transports of delight. José, my best friend, accepted my offering; the war was soon to be on, I would be avenged, and

José would regain his rubber-trees after our triumph. Then a canoe ground sharply on the sand-bar where I was standing, and looking up, I saw two young Indian friends from our village. With a cry of delight I sprang forward to meet them, but they stood with their arms flat against their sides. In their faces was no greeting for me.

"What is this?" I exclaimed, and stood looking at them, amazed.

The elder in an even, monotonous voice replied:

"Says José to Joaquín the traitor: I trusted you, I gave you my secret. You drank of my *chicha*, you slept in my house. I sent you away to do what you would. You betrayed me and broke the oath of a man and have given to others what I trusted to you. A curse on your head, and a curse in your heart, a curse on your tongue which knows only to lie; may the demons which lurk in the woods ever haunt you, may the gold you have taken for selling your trust be as fire burning your hand when you touch it. The curse of an old man be for ever upon you. You are defiled. The curse has been cast," and without pausing, a package of filth was thrown, bursting as it struck on my face.

No word of explanation would these two men hear from me, but whenever I spoke they set up a derisive baying, like the howling of dogs, mingled with groaning. Half mad with my doubts, I sank on my knees, pleading that they would at least give me some words of what had happened.

Briefly the younger man told me that a company of men led by Padre Tomás had taken the village in their possession, that he had given no word or money from

me to José, but had told him that I, now charmed with the life of the Church, was about to enter the priesthood and, in expectation of ease and power, had voluntarily given up the secret and told of the rubber; that Don Ignacio had proclaimed me his son, made legitimate at law, and with my assent, the title to all the rubber groves had been ceded to the Church. Again they bayed at me, making a sound like the howling of dogs.

"Padre Tomás has lied, a thousand times he has lied. I will kill him," I cried in my frenzy of rage and grief.

"Ay, kill him, and return José his rubber. That kills the curse. But you cannot do it. You are a liar for ever; we bay at you, as were you a dog," and without saying more, they turned again to their canoe, paddling steadily out on the lagoon and away into the sunset.

Despair was dark in my heart; hate, which up to now had been only glowing, was, at this last wrong, an all-consuming flame. How I would fight for my vengeance!

Cleaning the filth from my face and hands, I changed my clothes, and went to the church with humble appearance to hear Padre Maximo's teachings. With enthusiasm the good padre, — for this priest was really good — received me and gave me instruction, telling me, when he had finished, how much good had come of my information, and of the important papers which had been found. At this I was glad in my heart that they were deceived.

Then I sent word to ask if Monseigneur Tomás

would see me. Word came back that it was late, but that the monseigneur would do me the favour for a few moments. Without waiting, scarcely passing the compliments of *adiós* for the night with Padre Maximo, I went with noiseless step, seeking the evil monseigneur.

Noiselessly I passed through the empty courtyard, tapped lightly on his door, and the next instant was alone with him. I knew that my face was calm, my expression humble, yet my rage at seeing his porkish body of sleek fat was so deeply intense that I felt the blood swell and beat even to the tips of my fingers. I did not think to do him any harm; the place was not good nor was the time favourable. I only wanted to hear what had happened. The priest was excited, and evidently had been through great terrors. Finally he told me that the people in my village resented the title which the officers with Don Ignacio read to them; their claim was that the woods was theirs and that they would defend their property. A fight had taken place, and the Indians were beaten. A day or two later, when the expedition had gone to take possession of the lands, he, Monseigneur Tomás, had been set upon by the Indians, and had only escaped with his life.

"And before you went did you read José my letter and give him the money?"

"I thought that over carefully, and as José was the most enraged of all the Indians, it seemed best to me that you should not communicate with each other."

"And you let him think I was faithless?"

"Your faith is now in the Church."

"And they all think me a liar and sent men to bay at me and throw filth in my face!"

"That is little to me. I have to think of the good of the Church. Now go."

"Just one moment more, monseigneur," I said, drawing close to him. I knew my eyes were blazing with the wild intense spirit of the deep woodlands, the spirit that burns in the eyes of wild beasts. "My disgrace is little to you! You lying —"

"Go, or I alarm the house," and a fat, trembling hand was stretched forth to touch the bell.

"Not till I finish," I cried, and seized his arm. The touch of his flabby flesh set my brain in a fury; my spirit was beyond control. The touch of his body was like blood on the tongue, enraging a half-tamed beast of the forest. All the wrongs I had suffered, all his duplicity surged up in my brain as I tightened my grasp, and before he could give an alarm, I bore him down to the floor, my hand on his mouth that he might make no outcry. The fury within me found vent in my acts, though no sound came from my lips. I bore down on him, and felt his quivering fat as it trembled beneath me, saw the ashen grey of a terrible fear on his face, watched his eyes rolling, saw the greasy sweat stand out on his brow, felt his struggling breath, and knew he pleaded in his muffled gasping.

Holding him down, I cursed him in a low voice, told him he had lied in extorting my secret, that he had lied when he had said he would carry my money and words to José, that through his vile lies the Indians had come to bay at me and throw filth in my face. I cursed him, and called him vile names, blaspheming and cursing in a low, suppressed voice. My hatred mounted still hotter, yet in its burning the very suppression that I

had to hold on my voice increased the fury within me.

A wilder passion surged over me; my hand sought his throat and grappled it tightly. One hand pressed hard on his mouth, the other pinched like an iron vise on his throat. Beneath me I felt his body writhing; his pleading hands clutched at my sides, clutching, relaxing and clutching again. This was revenge, silent, deep revenge. I saw his eyes roll and fill red with blood, his face grow purplish dark. I felt, rather than heard, his gaspings for breath. In the corridor some one passed by. Insane, in a fury for vengeance, I gave no heed, but gripped my hand tighter, twisting his throat. I felt an upheaval run through his body; he grew black in the face, his eyes rolled up in their sockets, froth came on my hand at his mouth. In an instant the body was rigid, with a strangle of agony; it relaxed, and life had departed.

A terrible mocking ran through my thoughts. I wished that he were still living, that I might further torment him. I paused a moment, feasting my eyes on the hated form, lying prostrate; then I silently went to the door, and was making my way toward the great entrance, when I heard startled cries, and Pablo's voice shrieking out:

"Padre Tomás is dead, the monseigneur! Joaquín has killed him!"

Keeping well in the shadow, I passed on out of the entrance, leaving commotion, cryings and terror behind me. I heard the voice of the bishop call out in his horror, "Close the doors. Be quick, lest the criminal escape!"

But I was out of their immediate reach, and stood in

the street, well in the shadow of a place convenient for hiding. Here I waited, and presently heard the doors closed, and then the call for police. My time for flight had come, and swiftly I made my way to Doctor Zacate's, gave the signal for trouble and danger, and was admitted at once. Standing inside the vacant lot, I heard a group of passing officers excitedly talking and consulting one with the other as to where the Indian murderer might be in hiding.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ESCAPE

At my urgent request, I was taken at once to the Seven. There I told what I had done, not sparing a detail, and ended by saying in triumph, "Now that the curse is partly wiped out, the filth which the Indians flung in my face is partly cleansed from my heart; in the sight of my people I am not so bad."

"Well for him that he is already beyond the walls of the city. A serious matter this," I heard Doctor Zacate say, and another man answered, "Yes, bad enough, but we must not lose such a good fighter."

Then I heard the general's voice: "Yes, he will fight like a fiend. If they take him, his life will be forfeited. Let him wait in the stables till the city is calm, then give him arms, some provisions and money, and let him take a canoe and go to our camp. He knows the woods, and can find his way."

"Worthy general, I thank you, and I will fight for you always," I said, and would have dropped on my knee, from the habit learned at the church, but I remembered it was all dark, and my obeisance could not have been noticed. I almost laughed at myself and stood waiting for orders.

Evidently the general was thinking, but the next instant he said, "Let Teniente Garcia be called."

In a moment a man came to the room.

"Garcia and Buenevento, stand together, and on each other's hands swear your faith to one another and to our cause. Swear you will not betray the trust about to be imposed in you, even though your lives become forfeit through your faith to us and to each other."

We two men, standing up in the dark, clasped hands and swore faith to each other, and to our superior officers. Then the general gave us our orders.

"You, Teniente Garcia, are in command; Teniente Buenevento is under you. Alone you will repair to the landing while the excitement is still at its height, as the people search for Teniente Buenevento. Take a canoe, and say that you will go out to the sand-bar near the ocean, and see if the murderer may not be escaping by way of the beach. Once beyond the sight of those who may be watching, turn on your course and go to the mangrove point about four miles back of the city. There wait till Teniente Buenevento comes bearing despatches. When you are united, make all haste to our camp near the swamps above the lagoons. Teniente Buenevento knows well how to urge a canoe swiftly, and you, Teniente Garcia, are strong of arm, so by sunrise it is expected you will be well on your way and out of sight of the city."

Teniente Garcia sent a man to put his pack in one of the canoes, and would a little later carry out his part of our mission.

Then the general said, "Let Capitán Jimarez be summoned."

The capitán came, and was told to take a package of letters, and a servant, to carry a bundle of clothes for me, and to wait hidden by the trail leading out to the mangrove point. I was to make my way to the point, stop at the first group of mangrove-trees, and strike my foot on the ground, and then clap my hands softly. The capitán would then come out, and deliver to me the letters and equipment. If no searching parties had gone up the trail, he was to let me go on alone, and he with the servant would remain behind and prevent any one following. If searching parties had already gone ahead, the three of us were to go on together, and when we met the parties my companions were to make a disturbance, while I was to slip past them through the bushes and go on my way. Then my companions were to retreat, as if in great fear, and it was expected that those whom I was to avoid would follow the capitán and servant.

The general continued: "Teniente Buenevento, you have heard the instructions and know what you are to do. As soon as the streets become quiet, go to the trail leading through the mangrove-trees back of the city, take the pack of your clothes and equipment and the letters which will there be given you, and make all haste up the trail and out to the extreme end of the sand-point, where you will find Teniente Garcia. Obey his orders till you reach our camp above the swamps. There report to the general in charge."

"I will do all you tell me, faithfully always."

"Well said. Go now, and prepare for your duties."

I went at once, though for the present there was little to do. I must wait till the city grew quiet, but not till

too late, for then any one moving around would excite suspicion, and I knew many people would be anxious to make me a prisoner.

Doctor Zacate's house was well situated for those who wished to get quickly out in the country. The secret rear door opened on a back street, and beyond this was the town limit. As usual in Spanish towns, the houses were all crowded together. My plan was to make my way down the alley and cross the last street to another alley along which people frequently went in the evening. A false moustache, an old slouch hat and a well-worn suit of clothes, such as peons wear, had been provided for me, while my regular clothes I had put in my pack. Finally, as the town seemed quiet, I cautiously opened the secret door, and looked out. No one was near, and the next instant I was in the street, the man inside closing the door softly behind him.

A thrill of excitement trembled over my body, and hot blood rushed through my veins. The time for action had come; soon I would be free to fight for the cause, which to me seemed righteous and worthy. I had not delayed. I was in the alley now, and in a moment more was crossing out on the other street. A group of men were standing some distance down in front of the houses, but I paid no attention, nor even looked at them. Over a beaten track to a beach where men frequently went to a canoe landing I made my way, and in another moment I would be free from the town. As yet no one had disturbed me, but at that instant a police officer guarding the trails called out, "*Alto!* Halt! Who passes?"

"Can't a man go to the beach to attend his canoe?" I snarled.

"Oh, is that all?" he replied; "then pass," and I leisurely went toward the beach for a few steps, and then turning to a trail through the brush, made all haste to the place appointed.

Evidently my movements had aroused suspicion, for the policeman gave an alarm that a man had gone toward the beach, and had then turned toward the brush; perhaps it was the murderer. I heard people shouting, and knew that a searching party would soon be at my heels. Making all haste, I reached the appointed place, gave the signal, and waited impatiently for those who were to join me. Presently the bushes stirred, and my friends were at my side. Quickly the burden and package of letters were given to me, and I was ready.

"Is the way clear?" I asked.

"No; a party of men went up the path, searching for the murderer, we heard them say."

"How many men were there?"

"Eight or ten. A tough proposition for us. Hurry, I hear sounds of other people coming this way," and without further words we started at once up the trail.

Soon the searchers ahead were seen at a bend in the trail. Where we were, all was dark; but where they stood the pale light seemed strikingly clear in comparison to the dark mangrove swamps all around them. Evidently they were undecided, and here was our chance. Into the woods I glided noiselessly, for an Indian is master of such movements. My companions crept up in the shadow and waited a little till they heard the party pursuing me draw near, when they

smote their sticks together, and shouted, "Here, *compañeros*, here are the murderers, set on them!"

"We're not murderers," I heard my pursuers cry. "Don't shoot!" A rough fight began, but it soon stopped, when mutual recognitions took place. Speeding down the trail, I heard them no more, and a little time later stood on the sand-point. No canoe was there, but I dared not call out, and could only stand waiting. What if the searching parties should now overtake me? There was no chance for escape. Before me dark waters stretched out; the black line of the shore fell away behind me and was lost in the night. A gentle swell coming in from the lagoon lapped the sands on the shore, a misty damp hung in the air. All about me was silence, undisturbed silence. Back on the trail I thought I heard some one approaching; perhaps it was only a fancy. Out of the darkness weird shapes seemed to arise, which on closer examination proved to be only trees and bushes, seen more distinctly as my eyes became accustomed to the dim light about me.

At last I heard a sound on the lagoon. My pulse started throbbing; surely a canoe was approaching. At first it seemed like a dark, creeping shadow out on the water, then an indistinct shape, and then the canoe suddenly loomed up out of the night, and softly touched on the sands a little below where I was standing. Cautiously I went toward it, though I was sure it was Teniente Garcia. I pronounced his name, and to my delight heard him whisper my name in return, bidding me quickly come. I required no urging, and was at his side in an instant, and to our mutual gratification pushed

off from the shore. I could see by his anxious movements that there was danger abroad on the water. For a moment we paddled vigorously, and then he whispered to rest and listen for the sound of a canoe which he said had been following. Silently our canoe rocked on the peaceful waters. We could hear nothing.

"How much time do you think we have before daylight?"

I looked at the stars. "Not over four hours," I replied.

"That is bad. We should be well on our way, and I think a canoe is following us; their plan is to see where we go."

"Let us go to the eastern waters, and from there make our way to Centre River. They will follow up the Eastern Lagoons, thinking we are probably going to the old camp."

"No, they will follow us too close for that. They will always hear us. We must think of some other plan."

"I can paddle away from them so fast that we will be far in the lead, and the sound of paddling will indicate Eastern River. Before they can overtake us, we can be silently on our way to the new camp."

"It makes the way long, and I am not over-skilful at paddling."

"But, I am. Hark, a canoe is coming; we must act."

"Yes, there it is. If you can beat them, do it; but it is three against two."

"Wait and see," I answered, and giving a long sweep with my paddle, a tremor of joyous response came over my muscles as I laid myself to the exercise, to which from boyhood I had been accustomed. Gliding away

through the night, our canoe gathered speed, and we heard a shout coming over the water, "*Compañeros*, lay on your paddles and take them. It is either some one helping the murderer or a party of Liberals bent on making more trouble."

Like a thing of life our canoe was now leaping through the water, the sounds of my paddling, marking each stroke, telling our pursuers how rapidly we were making away.

"Hey, *compañeros*," I heard a voice say, "the devil himself must be paddling that canoe. No man could send it so fast."

"Man or devil," I heard another voice reply, "we follow on to the end. Their course indicates the Eastern Lagoons. Paddle softly. When they reach the river they will rest, and then we can take them, or if they keep on up the river we can always have them before us."

I required no more, but urged on, exulting in my strength, and I became almost intoxicated with triumphant joy at our quick motion through my efforts. On, still on, I urged my way, till Teniente Garcia whispered, "Buenevento, how can you do it?"

"Custom and strength, that's all. Rest your paddle a time; I will need your help when we reach the river." Garcia rested, and I forced the canoe on its way.

An hour or more passed, when a shore loomed up before us, and I found the mouth of Eastern River by tracing the current in the lagoon. Here we landed, and made sounds as though we were preparing a camp, then, without waiting, we took to our canoe again and turned to the west. I did not lift my paddle out of

the water, and, with no sound, made our way steadily along the muddy shore, seeking the mouth of Centre River, and the route to the swamps.

Again Teniente Garcia said, "How do you do it?"

In reply I gave a cautioning sound, imitating an insect, for voices can be heard a long distance at night on the water. Silently onward and onward we went; groups of trees loomed up before us, stood out in bold outline as we glided past them, and then faded away in the dark. At last we came to a stretch of water where I could see that a current was flowing, and knew that the mouth of a river was near. Following this current, we were soon making our way safely into the river, and then urging the canoe a little distance up its sluggish waters, I stopped to rest for a time, my superior officer making no objection.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN HIDING

I HAD now cause for satisfaction. Before me was the river, flowing down from the jungles which I had always loved. In the past lay the Church's school and the sacrificed priest whose death had wiped out part of the curse and part of the filth cast upon me. In the future were war and excitement, for which my heart burned, and the promise the Seven had given that the rubber-trees stolen by trickery should be returned to José. My heart was contented, my spirit was happy, and I rested, letting my muscles relax as they would; but not for long.

We had to be well on our way before the morning light came, and make our camp for the day, securely in hiding, for even an Indian, after hours of paddling, must tire, and cannot expect to contend with success against fresh men, and we could be well assured that in the morning all the rivers would be carefully searched. After a time a gray light came in the air, and, like rising shadows, forms seemed to loom up and then turn into trees; a crystal light filled all the air, followed by the coming of sunrise, a blushing and deepening of rose and gold in the sky, a wavering of light on the river's

dark waters, and then the full glow of the sun. It was morning.

Slowly our way was now taken, for I was looking for a convenient place to hide; but the banks were all low and muddy, and if we had hauled the canoe up, it would have left such a trail that a child could have found us. We were tired, but it looked as if we would have to work all the morning without any rest. Finally I noticed a giant tree which had fallen into the water, its roots a great mass forming a fan-shaped barrier on the bank. Here was our chance to find rest for the day. I proposed to lift the canoe over the roots, and as the river was flowing directly against them, there would be no sign at all if once we could get the canoe over.

"But that is impossible," said Garcia, when he heard my plan.

"I think I can do it," I said. "At any rate we can try."

One sweep of my paddle and the canoe was alongside the fallen tree. Getting a firm footing on the protruding roots, I had Teniente Garcia clamber over them with our effects; then, with a mighty straining, I raised the canoe, rested one end on the fallen tree, slid it up on the tree, raised the other end till it rested on the mass of roots above me, and then pushing and straining, I forced the canoe forward till it was on top of the up-turned roots, Teniente Garcia holding it there in place. I scrambled over the roots, and together we drew the canoe down and hid it carefully in the hollow behind the fallen tree; a perfect place to hide in, but we did not stop to rest till we had carefully covered up all traces of our work in dragging the canoe over the roots. A little

dry mud, a few dead leaves and some grass to cover the places which the canoe had torn and scraped on its way, and our hiding-place was perfected.

We sat down to enjoy a well-earned repose, had something to eat, for Garcia had laid in provisions, and then, each at an end of the canoe, we lay down to sleep. How long we would have slept I do not know, but as the sun rose higher the rays began to penetrate among the trees, and one fell directly on my eyes, where, flickering and dancing, it presently caused me to wake with a start, and to my amazement I heard Garcia snoring lustily. This would never do. If a canoe were passing we would surely be discovered, and now I noticed a group of monkeys in the trees, chattering and looking at us with frightened expressions. This was another danger, for a group of monkeys by their gestures will frequently betray one's hiding-place. The air was still, and far down the river I fancied I heard the sounds of paddling. Laying my ear close to the water, I was sure an expedition was coming up the river, and I had not much time to make plans. First I awoke Garcia, who from his readiness proved himself a good companion, and we instantly prepared for action. Our weapons were taken out, — a machette and a pistol for each; we would fight with energy, and come what might, would never be taken alive.


Our hiding-place was well secured, and we need not have had much concern, if the troop of monkeys had not excitedly gathered about us. It was some moments yet before the canoe would be passing, and we could have gone back in the woods, but immediately the monkeys would have taken possession of our canoe,

while some of them would certainly have followed us. Surely our position was difficult, and we must take some action quickly; at all hazards the monkeys must be enticed away from us and their attention attracted to something at the other side of the river.

About one hundred yards up the river on the opposite bank was a sand-point on which dry leaves and brush had accumulated. I had a bow and arrows with me, the Seven having provided them, knowing the skill of the Indians with such weapons, and having learned the value of an arrow on occasions, a silent messenger of death. On a bit of paper I wrote: "From this point the trail is to the Eastern Lagoons, where canoes are hidden. Let him who follows take heed not to disturb the trees and bushes, lest the way become known to others. Two hundred yards directly into the woods the trail will be found clearly marked."

This paper I fastened to an arrow with a piece of white cloth. Hurrying up the river, I shot it at an exposed log on the sand-point, and had the pleasure of seeing the arrow reach its mark. Sticking fast in the wood, it formed a signal to any who might be passing, and, too, it attracted the monkeys, who now gathered in front of it, and from our side of the river chattered excitedly, making motions toward the fluttering rag.

Back to our canoe I hastened, and with Garcia sat waiting, crouching close against the upturned roots. Through a place broken among them I could peep out, and distinctly see all in front of me; yes, a canoe was coming up and was nearly on us. It was a greater expedition than I had expected, some twelve or thirteen



well-armed men, with a small cannon mounted in the bow of the canoe. On they came, the steady paddling of so many hands sending them forward with momentum well maintained.

I heard the captain say, "Keep a sharp lookout for any signs on the mud where they could have pulled up their canoe to hide in the woods. What are those monkeys chattering at? Something has happened there. Urge forward and see what it means."

Responding to his orders, those who were paddling exerted their strength, and with gathering swiftness the canoe-load glided past our hiding-place, and we could see them disembark and carefully examine the ground. Some one pointed to the arrow and the fluttering white rag attached to it, and without delay all the soldiers hurried into their canoe and pushed off to the other side. We could see them easily and could almost hear their words, and but for the danger of our situation could have laughed joyously at their apparent earnest argument as to what should be done. Evidently some were for pushing on up the river; others would apparently look for the trail to the revolutionists' canoes. Finally these seemed to have the better of the argument, for two men, one an officer, went to sit in the canoe, and the others disappeared in the woods, bent on finding the trail which they thought my arrow had revealed. I could see that the captain did not think much of the discovery, but like a careful leader, started at once to investigate, that nothing might be left without attention, having no idea that danger might be near him and his party.

"Now is our chance," whispered Teniente Garcia.

"Let us creep through the woods, kill the two men with our rifles, swim the river, and bring the canoe and cannon over to our side before the other men can get out of the woods."

"Better not," I said; "the results will not be worth the killing. Let them search for a time, and finding nothing, go down the river again."

"After seeing your arrow, do you think they will go down the river again?"

"That gives me an idea. I might kill those two men with an arrow and not alarm the others. Then we could get their canoe and go on up the river."

"Can you do it?"

"I might, yet an arrow is not always sure. But I can hit them."

"And if they make an outcry?"

"Then we must finish them with our rifles, swim the river quickly, get their boat and sink it, and when it is dark take chances in getting our canoe up the river without being seen."

"You Indians are good in the woods," said Garcia, "but for my part I would like to secure the cannon and the canoe-load of provisions."

Our plans were all of no avail, and it was indeed fortunate for us that we had done nothing, for now we heard the men coming back from their search. They had not found the trail, and being, it was clear, experienced men in the woods, had not remained searching. Now they were at their boat again, and I heard the leader say, "The murderer has gone up the river. Perhaps he and his party are not far ahead and shot that arrow to deceive us and gain time for themselves.

Well, they have not gained much on us. Lay on your work, men, and set the pace after them."

Without waiting further orders, each man sprang to his place. The canoe was immediately pushed out into the stream and urged forward at all the speed they could command. For the time being we were safe, but what course was best for us seemed doubtful, and those monkey pests were now coming back and might follow after us for days. I could have killed some with my arrows, but that would only have caused them to raise a great outcry, and perhaps bring increased difficulties, for all the monkeys within hearing distance would have certainly come trooping about us at the calls of their fellows.

Monkeys are strange creatures, sometimes so timid that one may scarcely come up with them, at other times so curious that one may not be rid of them, and again they will even show fight, threatening the traveller with sticks, nuts, broken branches, or anything which may come handy. The monkeys about us were in the curious stage, and might easily be the cause of our discovery and capture.

Our situation was certainly difficult. We could not abandon the canoe and make our way on land, because long stretches of deep muddy swamp were before us. To go back was to invite capture, for other searching parties would surely be out. The Church gave liberal rewards, and the government officers had now begun to suspect revolution, and would also have their parties abroad. To take our canoe on up the river was to invite an encounter with our enemies who had gone before us. Our mistake had been in sleeping too soon; we should

have kept on till we were above the swamps. For a time we could do nothing, and only sat considering and looking at one another.

Then I said, "We had better sleep again, and be ready for whatever may come to-night."

"But what shall we do to-night? Have you any plan?"

"No, but I'll dream one."

"Then go to sleep and dream as fast as you can. I don't like this at all."

"You must sleep too, but you must go back in the swamp, because you snore."

"I don't."

"You did this morning. It woke me up and called the monkeys."

"It did?"

"Yes, it did. See, I will fix a good place for you back in the woods."

"But I can't sleep in the mud."

"I'll fix it; wait," and taking his *tolda*, I went back to the swamp, found an old mud-bar made by a former flood on the river, and there prepared him a camp such as I had often made in the woods. I hung his *tolda*, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him disappear under it, where he would remain for the day. Then I went back to the canoe, just in time to save our supplies, for the troop of monkeys were cautiously climbing down from the trees. At my approach they scampered away, made themselves safe, and began an angry scolding, an ill omen for us should another searching party come up the river. I would have given them some of our supplies, but knew from experience

that this would make them more persistent. I could have imitated the cry of a great hawk to frighten them and drive them away, but feared the disturbance which would have followed.

Searching parties would be many, but how to outwit them? Suddenly I thought of my hat, an Indian straw I had brought in my pack, and which I had always worn and which every one knew. Quickly I took it out, made a slight cut on my breast where it would be the least inconvenience, smeared the hat with blood, punched a hole in it, and set it floating down the sluggish current; some one might find the old hat and think I had been killed. After that I stretched myself out in the canoe, for, even though the excitement could not be else than intense, the lull which now came in events made my eyes heavy, and though I did not enjoy sound sleep, still I rested, dozing off and starting awake from time to time. I did not hang my *tolda*, because I wished to wake up in the evening, and I knew that, however well I might sleep, when evening came the mosquitoes would rouse me, so I gave myself up to rest and slept as I could.

While I was dozing, I heard the sound of a paddle striking the water, and peeping out from my hiding-place, saw a canoe with two men, one of whom had my hat, which he was regarding intently.

"Yes, I am sure it is his," and as he said this the canoe was brought close to the upturned tree behind which I was hiding; then it was tied to one of the branches and the two men sat at their ease discussing my hat.

"Yes, some one has killed him," one said.

"But we have his hat, we might claim some of the reward."

"We might, but that boat-load of soldiers is too strong."

"True, and they can get back to the city before us."

"Well, let's call them now, and before they can say a word we can claim that we killed him."

"Agreed. We will try it," and the older man took up a conch shell and blew three long blasts on it. Presently from way up the river I heard an answering blast.

I was alert now, and scarcely knew that I was tired. My rifle was ready, and while I could scarcely hope that my hiding-place would not be discovered, still I resolved to fight till the last, and destroy my despatches before our enemies could get them in their possession. With care I brought myself to a position as comfortable as might be, and which would enable me to occasionally peep out for an instant. I knew better than to keep watching steadily, for many people in hiding have betrayed themselves by intent gazing on those whom they would avoid, and, for an instant only, I occasionally peeped out to see what they were doing.

The men in the canoe were half-caste Spaniards, ill-looking fellows, but strong for their kind. I had noted that one was not much more than a boy, the other a man of full years, swarthy complexioned, with a blotch on the left side of his nose. This I would carefully remember, for should I escape, it might be convenient at some future time to have a witness that I had been killed.

I heard them making their plans and decide that, as

the big canoe came within hailing distance, the younger man would call out that they had killed me and say they had seen me coming down the river alone in my canoe. Striking at me suddenly from a place of hiding, they had overturned it before I could shoot, and then struck me with their iron-tipped poles used to push the canoe. The alligators had done the rest, and my canoe being heavy and old, had sunk, but they had secured my hat, which would enable them to claim the reward.

Now I knew by their excited whisperings together that the big canoe was approaching. The younger man called out:

"We've got it. We've killed him."

"You have?" came an answer, and a chorus of other inquiries and shouts fell on my ears, while the monkeys in the trees set up a chattering and screaming; but they were not so dangerous to me now, because the men would naturally think that they had themselves attracted the monkeys' attention. There came a jar on the tree, a scraping sound, and I knew that the big canoe had been made fast. Cautiously I peeped through an opening formed in the roots and saw them all examining my hat, the two men elated, the others chagrined and angry.

Finally one of the men in the big canoe said, "Well, we have lost the game; we might as well go back to the city."

"Lost nothing," his leader said. "We all killed him together."

"You lie," shouted the man who had found my hat.

"Lie, do I? Lie, you peon! We can fight it out here."

Now the others took up the quarrel. "Yes, we all killed him. We drove him down the river." "We would have had him alone." "I wounded him myself." Then I heard the sneering voice of the leader saying, "See how many witnesses we have against you, and besides, we can get back to the city first."

"Thief! Liar!" shrieked the man in the smaller boat.

"So. I can make you eat your words, and then let the alligators eat your leprous body. Come, we killed him together. Are you satisfied?"

"Well, then, we killed him together, but you tow us back to the city."

"Agreed," and without more words the two canoes started hastily down the river. What a relief to my feelings! Like a heavy burden taken off from one's back on a journey, or a breath of fresh air after one had been almost stifled, was this to my heart, as I stretched my limbs in security, and peeping cautiously out, saw my enemies rapidly forcing their way down the river.

I almost laughed aloud as I thought how I would soon be officially dead, and a reward paid to those who had invented such a fine tale. No doubt the priests would be saying prayers and making petitions to Heaven that purgatory might at last cleanse my evil spirit, that the good in me might be brought to godly perfection, though they had themselves so signally failed to make anything of me. I had been in the Church, and I knew they would pray for me, and these thoughts might have touched my heart, but I hated them to that extent that I could think no good of them at all and had no regard for their prayers.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LIBERALS' CAMP

OUR opportunity to start on again had come. I was alert and rested, and in a few moments, when I was sure the canoes of our enemies were well beyond hearing, I went to call Teniente Garcia. I found him comfortably asleep and loath to get up, and at this I was troubled, for in our Indian fights we were always ready, and he who slept overmuch would be surely defeated. But then I remembered the Seven, and felt sure that when I reached camp I would find discipline, energy and excellent order; so urging my superior officer, and telling him of our chance to get on, and of the danger that our enemies might turn back for some reason or other, I soon had him on his feet.

Together we presently got our canoe in the water, and urged by my paddle, we made good progress; nor did I stop paddling till evening came, and then only for a brief rest, and to have something to eat. Then it was on again. Teniente Garcia wished to make camp for the night, but I was determined that we should get above the swamps without further delay, so volunteering to do all the paddling, and assuring him that an Indian could follow a river even though it were dark, he gave

his consent and made himself comfortable while I settled down to work for the night.

An evening on a strange river has a charm that one cannot forget. The sunset lights up the woodlands; soft colours, reflections from the clouds overhead, float in the water; trees, for a brief time vivid, grow gradually duller. Where the woods have been a glowing green, olive shades, greys and browns succeed, and blend in soft harmony; shadows and violet lights float over the water; the azure sky begins to shade to a soft bluish grey. The bright light of day goes out, the twilight lingers a little, and then it is dark. Night and day follow quickly one after the other.

Paddling cautiously, I made steady progress, though our way was not rapid. Above us the sky and the stars, shining and glimmering over the river, marked a line of light, a guide for our course, while on either side stood the dark jungles. Now and then a wild animal stirred, the night voices held their monotonous chorus, and then came a loud snoring, disturbing the calm and jarring loud on the harmonious depths of tranquillity which reigned all about us. Teniente Garcia was sleeping.

Let him sleep, I thought to myself; when it comes to real war he will find sterner conditions, if I am not mistaken, the general will know how to command. So communing with myself, listening to, and feeling the influences of night, nursing my hate and planning how I would find revenge for all my wrongs when our cause was triumphant, I paddled steadily on, nor cared to stop and rest. Hate impelled me forward; to go on was to achieve, and I still felt the sting of the whip

on my back, and heard the mock voice of José calling on me to yield up our secret. My revenge for this would be deep and unrelenting. Is it that rage and hate lend strength to the arm, and keen sight to the eye? However it was, I urged the canoe on, and through the darkness guided it safely. No stopping to rest; the spirit of hatred was burning within me, and I could not rest.

"Halt!" a voice rang out in the night. "Who goes there?" it continued.

"A friend," I replied as I had been instructed, and knowing I had at last reached the camp.

"Then yield yourself to the authority here established. Advance and give the sign of a friend."

"From the Seven who meet in the dark I am bringing despatches; other word I have none."

"It is well. Bring your canoe to the landing and tell us the news."

Obedying, I found a sentinel, well armed and watchful, who, on seeing Garcia asleep, said, "Who have you here, coming asleep to our camp?"

"Teniente Garcia. It was his turn to sleep. We have toiled all the night up the river. He would have been awake and watchful, but we thought the camp was still far away."

At this instant Garcia awoke and in a frightened voice called out, "Are we captured?"

"No, we have come to our camp."

"Oh," he said, assuming an air of authority, "we will report at once to the officer commanding the watch."

The sentinel blew a light call on a musical whistle,

a reed pipe which would scarcely have attracted attention if a stranger chanced to be near, and in a few moments a teniente and guard appeared, to whom the sentinel reported.

"You bring despatches," this officer said. "Give them to me."

"I am in command of the canoe," Teniente Garcia replied. "We bring despatches, but our orders are to deliver them to the general in person."

"The general is sleeping, and I cannot take you into the camp because you have not the word of a friend. Do you not bring a letter to the comandante in charge?"

"Our departure was hurried," I said, "we have only despatches."

"Wait here and I will ask for orders."

The teniente and his men went away, but in a short time came back, saying that he could take us to the camp, but as prisoners till we could make ourselves known. To this we agreed, and were immediately taken in charge. I was too tired to take any heed of our surroundings, and no doubt looked indifferent enough, for now there was no cause for alertness or attention. But Teniente Garcia was throwing out his chest, and talking loudly of our efforts and adventures, extolling himself, and telling how much of the work he had done. This I noticed, but with Indian indifference went at once to the place where we were to sleep, put the despatches carefully into my shirt, and buttoned my coat over them. Teniente Garcia could talk and boast as he would.

Next morning I was awakened by the call of a bugle,

and had my first experience in a revolutionary camp when it was inactive. I sprang to my feet at once and would have gone out, but a guard reminded me that I was a prisoner, and must so remain till the general had seen me. Confinement was not pleasant, but I reflected, where so many important matters were demanding attention, I could not expect to be heard at once.

From the hut where I was held I could see the routine work of the camp. The soldiers, clad in all sorts of odd garments, stood up in a line for inspection. The officers, in a variety of uniforms, walked along in front of the soldiers, all giving orders, but to these their men paid but little attention. The guards were arranged for the day, and the men went about their various affairs, which principally seemed to be the securing of their rations as quickly as might be and then repairing to their huts to cook, loaf, gamble and pass the time as to them seemed most convenient. The officers, too, now prepared to make themselves comfortable. Truly it did not look much like war, and I was discouraged; but I learned afterwards that these men could fight, and that fighting, not science and accurate drill, was what we required in our disorganized battles.

Presently I saw Teniente Garcia, who already had made friends with everybody in spite of being a prisoner, the centre of an admiring group of young officers, to whom he was relating his adventures and valour in our trip up the river. Finally word came that I was to be sent to the general, and without delay, a guard on either side, I went to his hut, better built, I noticed, than those of the other officers. Here I found a well-

appearing man sitting at a table, wine and cigarettes before him, with young officers to attend to his wants and a secretary to conduct his correspondence. He was dressed in soiled linen trousers and an undershirt, nothing more, but then it was hot in the camp.

I stood respectfully before him, and when he told me to report, gave him the despatches. These he read with attention, and then said, as he signed a paper, "Here is your commission from the Seven, countersigned by me as your commanding general. Report your trip up the river."

I told of our work and difficulties briefly and without mentioning any valiant deeds as Garcia had done, but giving all the information I could in regard to the men who had been sent to search the river to find us. He seemed pleased with my report, but a frown came on his brow as he said, "And the cannon, why did you not attack it when only two were left to guard?"

"We were preparing to attack, but the two were on guard for a brief space only."

"Garcia says you could have taken it had you acted quickly. Remember this, in our wars we always attack. Had you both lost your lives in wrecking the canoe and dumping the cannon into the river, you would have done a service for our glorious cause which would have rendered your names immortal in our Republic. Daring bravery, valiant achievements even to death, that is what our cause requires of us. Had Teniente Garcia and I been there, we would have given our lives, but the cannon would have been lost in the river." I was deeply cut by his words and looked at him in amazement; what could Teniente Garcia have told him, that

he thought me lacking in courage? Then finding my voice, I replied, "Yes, general, Teniente Garcia was brave, and I was too cautious, but you will find that I am not lacking in courage."

"It is well said, and you take your correction with a serious mind. This promises much for the future. When will you be ready for duty?"

"This instant," and I looked at him, still more surprised.

"So soon? That is well. Most officers, when they first come to camp, must rest for a time. Garcia cannot yet report for duty."

"I am ready now," was all that I said.

"So. If you had only been as ready to attack the cannon; but no doubt you will improve."

"I will try to improve. I have suffered great wrongs. I come to fight for the cause and for my own revenge on our opponents. They are my enemies both in war and in peace."

"Well said, and you must begin your work at once. I hear that you are skilled in the woods. First show us what things are here which can be used for food, and show us how to obtain them. Take with you ten men who are not in attendance on the officers, teach them to obtain supplies from the woods, and instruct them how to put up camps quickly. Then take your men and find a way for us through the woods along the hills and over the mountains to the town of San Esteban. There we will make our first attack. Have you any suggestions?"

"No," I said hesitatingly.

"No? Say on; your no seems to indicate something."

"Then, general, I think the camp is much exposed and should be made farther up the river, at a place not so easily reached should an expedition come to destroy it. The place here seems poor for defence, and our army is not very strong."

"If we were here to hide, your ideas would be good, but we are here to fight. Let an expedition come, the more cannon they bring the better results to win for our cause. As soon as the alarm of their coming reaches our camp, we will go out to fight them in ambush down the river-bank, and our attack will be swift and sure. Though all of our lives are given as a sacrifice on the sacred altar of freedom and equal rights, it will be well, because some, yes, perhaps all of their cannon, will be lost in the river, and our brothers will then be better able to cope with the enemy. Would all their guns might be sent against us, that we might give our lives to our brothers in arms!"

Fire gleamed in my eyes as I listened. What plan could be better? What a coward I had been! Why was I not dead in the river with a cannon lying beside me, where it could do no more harm to our brothers in arms?

"General, forgive me! General! General! I have been a coward. Now I will fight! Now I know what to do!"

"That is the spirit. That is the ardour we want," and the general rose and embraced me, and I fell on his neck, promising faithfulness to whatever duty might be assigned me.

Then he said, "You have heard the plan of battle. If the enemy comes we all fight together. Let your rifle and sword be always ready, and when the call

sounds, attack. Now pick out your men, and if you are prepared for work, proceed with your duties."

I required no second bidding, and with heart exultant, and with feelings thrilled with affectionate regard for my general, I went to report to the coronel in whose charge I would be, thinking all the time as I went that I had found a man, a man I could reverence, a man I could serve. With him in command, we would destroy the priests' power and drive them all from the country; and my heart beat high and my hate burned and glowed at the thoughts of revenge.

I found the coronel asleep, but managed to awaken him by loud talking. Angrily he demanded my business, but was somewhat appeased when he learned that my first work would be to hunt through the woods for provisions, and teach the men how to gather supplies of fresh meat and green food for the camp. After seeing the coronel I had to go to the comandante, and disturbed him at a game of cards over which he and some officers were gambling. By him I was referred to the capitán, but he was there at the game. At first he did not care to go and announce to the men their new duty, but on learning that fresh meat and other supplies might result, he reluctantly laid down his cards and went with me.

The men, some two hundred or more, were called, grumbling at the disturbance, and took their places slouching in line. I began to pick out my ten, but each one I chose was detailed to serve some officer in one capacity or another, and after I had tried the whole two hundred I found but one who was not on some detailed work, and he was merely a boy. The capitán

said I was lucky to get even one, but if I was sharp I could get other men as recruits came in. He went back to his cards and his gambling, saying he hoped I would succeed in finding provisions in plenty, and that I would make a good road to San Esteban, as they did not like any hard marching.

It was a discouraging outlook, but it began to dawn on my mind that in this camp each officer did about as he pleased, and looked out for himself as he could. I made up my mind, however, that they could fight, and as that was our principal object, I found little reason to question their acts. When there was no fighting on hand, why should they not enjoy themselves as they thought best? I would be doing that myself by and by. But I could not carry out my work with only a boy to help me, so I went back to the men and told them of the different good things to eat which could be had in the woods, and talked to them of the pleasures of hunting, which, next to the fierce joys of combat, were the greatest to be found in the world.

This had the desired effect, and machettes in hand, the whole crowd was ready to follow. But I took only nine, because I noticed that my boy was a stout-looking rascal, and I thought it well to keep him close to me, as he was the only one really at my disposal. The men went to ask permission of their various officers, a permission readily given, with an admonition to bring supplies in plenty, and with the whole camp looking on, we went to the woods.

It was now past the middle of January, the height of the dry season, and fruits would not be abundant, but I knew of various plants which could be had. A few

steps from the camp we found a group of palm-trees, the kind which yield a sort of wine, and knowing all would like it, and that it was nutritious and fattening, I set to work at once preparing the trees. Some were felled by the men, and we cut in their trunks square openings at intervals, where water and sap might collect; others we cut at one side while they were still standing, making an opening in which a cup could be thrust, and then I had the men scoop out the soft interior, making a considerable cavity, where sap would collect, and by evening we would have coyal wine in abundance. From a spring near the palm-trees we dipped up water with buckets, and filled the openings cut in the logs, and gathering cups of sap from the places made in the trees, we placed a cupful in each opening cut in the logs. This would give us a mild wine, not so sour as that which would form in the trees, and some liked it better.

Through the woods there were many species of palm-trees, and from some of them a great central bud could be taken which made pleasant eating, especially when boiled with salt. The true cabbage-palm did not grow in these woods, but of the inner buds of other palm-trees there was no lack, and as each tree would yield enough for three men and the trees were very abundant, there was no need to economize in our supplies. We cut a good load and started taking it back to camp, each trip more of the soldiers following us out to the woods. In a short time the camp was supplied, some of the best pieces being sent to the general.

I knew that in the river fish were abundant, but to catch them was not so easy. The men had tried fishing

with hooks and lines, but results had been indifferent, and I knew that poor luck only could be expected from such methods. I meant to try *manzanillo*, a poison procured from both a plant and a tree, which would paralyze fish if put in the water. But care was required that the juice did not touch one's skin, for it would poison and blister most cruelly. The tree was found after some little searching, and I showed the men how to handle the leaves and cut the inner bark without letting the sap touch the hands. All we had to do was to mash the leaves and bark to a pulp, and on throwing this into the water we soon had the pleasure of seeing fish come floating up to the surface, and we could gather in from our canoes such as we would, letting those which we did not want float down the river to revive in fresher water after a time. We could by these means have fish whenever we wished, and all the time we remained in that camp the supply of catfish and river perch was sufficient. The men began to be enthusiastic over our hunting.

Then we considered how game might be obtained without firing guns, for that would have been dangerous should an enemy be near enough to hear them. To catch wild hogs, which were continually roaming about through the woods, was not very difficult. Pits were dug in the ground and then covered over with light poles and dead leaves, and bait was so arranged that the wild hogs would crowd on the treacherous covering. All we had to do was to keep the pits covered and spread the bait for the hogs, and we would catch probably more than we wanted. Many a fine pig-sticking time there was in the succeeding days.

They were called priests by our men, which seemed to give greater sport to the killing; and occasionally, when a large hog was imprisoned, the men set up a shout that a bishop had been caught, and this seemed to give great satisfaction, though the meat was by no means so good as that obtained from the smaller animals. Yet our men had stout teeth, and seemed always to enjoy the fun of killing, cooking and eating a bishop, and the bigger the better.

The hunting gave me plenty of work, and besides this there was much which required attention. The huts were badly made, and if rains should come would not answer. To remedy the defects, I had quantities of palm leaves brought from the woods, and with these rethatched all the roofs securely.

I had taken about five days for all this work, and during that time was the only officer who seemed to be busy, but no doubt the others were occupied with more serious duties; at least, I thought so at the time. While I had been engaged at my first duties, several groups of men had arrived at our camp, and nine of these, with the boy who had been first in my company, were enrolled as rangers, Teniente Joaquín Buenevento commanding. I was proud enough of the appointment, and soon won the confidence of all my men. We talked and discussed together how we would fight, and were continually sharpening our machettes, for our idea of a good fight was to get in at close quarters where we could see plenty of blood. So we planned and discussed and were enthusiastic for the cause and our own expectations.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THE WINDOW

MY next duty was to find the road which would lead us out to the town and valley of San Esteban. This was hard, and required careful searching, yet the work must be urged on, because our general was impatient to strike the first blow, and eager to take the city before the revolutionary movement was fully discovered and while most of the government troops were in the western part of the Republic.

I first took a canoe with two of my men and went up the river, examining the banks till I found a place where it seemed that the ground was really firm. Here I made a short trip into the woods, and finding that firm land continued, went back to camp, got my men and a supply of provisions, and turned my face to the woods, that covering of safety, that region of freedom so much beloved by the Indians. Quickly we reached the place where I had planned to start the trail, and from there cut our way into the forest. At first we made only marks on the trees, but as we penetrated into the woods and away from the sight of the river, we began to cut out and lay about us freely, making a broad trail through the jungles. Fortune favoured our efforts,

and in two days we reached the foot-hills of the mountains which separated us from San Esteban.

Here came the most difficult part of my mission, to find a trail over these mountains. My first care was to climb the tallest tree in the vicinity, and perched high in its branches, I had a good view of the mountainous country before me. I knew the city was just below the highest peak, which I fancied I made out distinctly, and carefully noting the direction in which the ridges lay, I climbed down from my perch, and without more delay set to work marking out the trail. It was no easy task surely, and after two days of hard work, in which the rocky precipices of the inner ranges blocked our way and we had to turn back time and again, we found a narrow ridge which led up to the main range. Once there, our next difficulty was to find water, because the soldiers of the army could not cross the mountains in a single day, and stopping-places must be prepared for them. We made our way along the top of the range toward the great peak overlooking the city, and I noted carefully the ground on either hand. Presently I found a sort of basin eroded out on the side nearest the city, and there I was sure spring water could be found, and in this I was not mistaken, for cold water was gushing out of the rocks, clear and sparkling, such as thirsty soldiers would drink with delight. Here I prepared a camp, the men working with me, and soon a lot of comfortable though rough sheds had been built.

The next problem was to find a trail from this camp down to the valley. The most natural way was along the spring run, but I knew better than to follow down

a stream cut in the mountains, because one always reaches impassable ground, so turning at right angles from it, I made a path to the top of the ridge overlooking the basin, then searching about, I found after a time a spur of this ridge leading down in the direction which we would follow. The descent was at first rough, but presently the ground became easier, and then the way to the valley was open. Now we proceeded somewhat with caution, for it was possible that people might be in the woods, and to meet them would be dangerous to our cause. Everything went in our favour, and presently we were down the mountains.

We left off cutting the trail, and bidding my men rest till I should return, I went on alone through the woods, marking the trees on my way, that I might be sure of finding my men again without unreasonable delay. My object was to learn the most direct route to the city, and presently I was delighted to find a mule-trail, and following this, I came on a road which I was sure led to San Esteban. Without waiting to learn more, I went back to my men and told them of my success. Enthusiasm reigned: the rich city of San Esteban would soon be ours. To make our information more sure, I proposed that with two others I would the next day go into the city unarmed, learn the news, see if troops were there to protect it, and then go back and report to our general.

I found my men ready for any adventure, and made my own selection of the two men who should go with me, telling the others that in the morning they must go back to our upper camp in the eroded basin. They grumbled somewhat, but a day at rest in that beautiful

place had its attractions, so after a time we were all agreed.

In the morning we were off with the dawn, I and my two companions. The air in the woods was bracing and refreshingly cool, but not chilly, and we pressed on with eager steps. Presently we reached the road, and in an hour or more saw the pleasant city of San Esteban.

We had met various parties of men and women, and had exchanged greetings with them. Some asked our business, and were told that we were in the government service, on our way to some of the smaller cities of the interior to work as couriers for the Post-office Department. Many questions we answered, always as to whether or not war was expected. To all we gave our assurances that there would be no war, and went on our way with their blessings, because all dreaded a revolution.

Now we were entering the city, and presently curious eyes were upon us; evidently our tale had spread abroad in the city. Without stopping, we went straight on, as if intent on some purpose, nor stopped to inquire. But presently an officer of the police stopped us and asked if we brought letters for the prefect, or if we would seek the comandante; to which we replied that we were but poor men, sent to the interior cities, where we would work as mail couriers, and that we brought no letters and had no orders to stop at San Esteban.

The officer hesitated, and looking at me intently, said, "But for the fact that the murderer Buenevento has been killed in the swamps, I would take you into custody, for you are very like the description."

"Was he an Indian?" I asked.

"So they say, but I do not certainly know."

"I am an Indian, and all Indians look alike to the Spaniards; that's why you see a resemblance. Who is this murderer?"

"A devil, so far as we can make out. Perhaps it is the devil himself. He killed a holy priest, yes, choked him to death in his own church, and the priest had been his best friend always."

"A strange man to kill his best friend."

"A strange man? A devil-man, that's what he was. But he's in the swamp rotting now, and all good people curse him, that the stench of his body may haunt the swamp always. And you bring no message for the prefect?"

"Why should we? We are humble men, and the country is completely at peace."

"Well, there's talk of trouble. Those atheists called Liberals, and the Masons, in their idolatry and devil-craft are plotting. We know it."

"In that case," I said to my men, "the quicker we get on our way the better. Come," and wishing the officer good-morning, we left him looking after us a moment somewhat doubtfully, while with steady tramp we went up the main street.

Unhesitatingly we took our way through the centre of the city, where all was life and activity. We saw the cuartel, and noticed its location as we passed by, but did not more than glance at it, fearing to excite suspicion. We had passed the business portions of the city, and were taking our way among the residences where the wealthier people lived, not very pleasing in appearance,

but no doubt comfortable. Low single-storied houses they were, whitewashed, with red-tiled roofs, great wooden doors sufficiently large to admit a mounted horseman to the inner court, broad windows with heavy iron gratings, and plaster mouldings about the windows and doors varying somewhat in form and design, and giving to each house a slightly different appearance, though they all looked like prisons, and in truth that they were. The women and girls were in these houses under restraint, for this was an old Spanish city, and the men were jealous and kept their women secure. Each house occupied a good space of ground, all of it walled in, with but one entrance, and at that entrance a man was always on guard, so that none might go in, and none might come out except the attendant saw them and could give his master full information. Here few people were in the streets, and as we went our eyes wandered from house to house as we fancied, for there was now little danger. No one would think it strange that we were looking about.

On a sudden I stopped, and a thrill ran through my body at the sight of a young woman standing in one of the windows. She was a vision, a goddess on earth in the flesh. Full rounded and firm was her form, her eyes clear and dark, her glance tender and yet unflinching, and a brow that an artist might copy when painting the Virgin; an angel to look at, a form to adore, though a proud curl on her lips gave a sign that one's adoration might not be too familiar. I thought how I would present myself at her window after our army had taken the city, and carefully noting the name of the street and the number, I went on with my men, nor lingered to look at the girl in the window.

Our way took us out on the road which led from the city toward the interior, and our problem of getting back to the men must now be considered. A Spanish-American city is nearly always the same, whether large or small: a square in the centre, with a church at one side, the municipal buildings opposite the church, houses of business or residences on the two remaining sides, and from this central square the other streets are laid out parallel and at right angles. All about the city in every direction are the gardens and farms of the people. San Esteban was not very large, but the lands around it had been cleared up for an unusual distance, and on all the paths leading out from the different streets were groups of people seeking their work for the day.

In such a small city any event is eagerly discussed, and our sudden appearance in the town had been talked about in the market-place and in the streets. In the fields and even in the woods we would meet people, and with thoughts of revolution in every one's mind, any attempt we might make at returning would attract immediate attention. The soldiers would have us in the cuartel, and then what would become of our companions left behind in the mountains? Well, it would go hard with them, though no doubt, after their provisions were gone, they would find their way back to the camp by the river with stories of what a fool Teniente Buenevento had been to run himself into a trap when the first smoulderings of war were filling the air.

With gloomy thoughts in my mind, my two perplexed men looking at me, how should we get back unobserved, was the question. Then like a vision the remembrance of the beautiful girl I had seen at the

window came over my spirit, and in my mind's eye she seemed to be standing before me, a radiance of beauty, proud beauty with a graceful form which a goddess might have envied. She was my inspiration. I wanted to see her again and besides I had a plan which might help us out of our troubles. Starting to my feet, I said, "*Compañeros*, we will go back directly, and all, yes, every one may see us as we go."

"Yes, and take us prisoners. We stay here."

"No, I have a sure plan. Listen. I am in love, my heart is on fire, my soul must let my eyes rest once again on the girl we saw at the window. We will turn back. For this you must reproach, scold, and make fun of me, but I will go in spite of all you can say. We will pass her house, we will learn who she is, and for the sake of my seeing her again, we will cross the city pretending that we will later return on our way. Yes, tell the people I will cross and recross the city all through the day till I see my love once again at her window; then, and not till then, will I go to the interior. Here come some people now; begin your chaffing at me and complaining."

"Why do you tarry?" the leader of these people asked as they came up with us.

"Tarry? This crazy fool won't go on at all."

"Won't go? Why not? Why won't he go?"

"He's seen a girl, and he swears he will see her again before he goes on."

"What girl? Oh, do you mean the one who lives in the street which leads out past the church?"

"Yes, yes," I cried in an ecstatic voice. "It is she, it is she. Do you know her?"

"A hopeless place for you to lose your heart," the man answered. "Better give it up. Go on and forget her."

"No, no, I must see her again. Tell me her name."

"Her name is Eulalia, and she is the niece of Don Ignacio, the rich rubber merchant. Now you know, and you must understand that your love is hopeless."

I started; blood surged to my heart, and then to my face. I had feigned love, and if the truth were told, was really influenced by it, but the name of Don Ignacio brought hatred. Yet I concealed it well, and in a passionate voice cried, "Eulalia, beautiful Eulalia, I will see you again, and fall on my knees at your window."

"San José protect him," a woman said, who was passing, "but the poor boy is far gone."

"Yes," laughed one of the men, "and a fine crowd of young fellows he'll find at that window, each anxious to break the head of any newcomer," and turning to me, he said again, "Better go on. Give it up and go on."

"Yes, come. We'll go," my men said together, and one of them took me by the arm.

"Yes, we'll go," I replied, "go back to see the girl again. Eulalia! Eulalia!" and repeating her name, I started to run toward the city, my men following as if they would catch and restrain me. As we entered the city, we met the police officer we had seen in the morning.

"Here, what is this?" he demanded. "You back again?"

"Oh, Señor Official, Señor Official, I must see her

again, just see her one moment, and then I will go on and not turn back till my work is finished."

"See whom? Has the Indian gone crazy?"

"We don't know," one of my men answered. "He saw a girl this morning called Eulalia, and must now turn back to look on her again."

"Kick that idea out of your mind, you crazy Indian," the police officer said to me. "Eulalia won't look at you."

"But I will look at her. Oh, Eulalia! I will look at her, she cannot stop that."

"Well, do as you please," laughed the officer, "but if you hang around here too long, I'll take you to the cuartel."

Hurrying forward, we were soon in front of the house, and with a cry of dismay I saw it was closed. I insisted on wandering around the city, saying I would go back to the house later, but when opportunity offered, I told the men to gradually approach the place where we had entered the city. "Eulalia, oh, Eulalia!" Yes, I would see her again sometime perhaps, but not now.

Soon we were passing out of San Esteban, and we were out on the road. A little farther on we were passing among the fields, and presently came to bushes and woodland, where we could hide if pursued. We were out of sight of the city, and starting running, made good distance, and presently turned into the woods.

We continued on steadily, and presently found the trail we had marked. We hurried on with some exertion, were soon deep in the mountains, and after a few hours'

climbing were at our camp on the ridge with our friends, resting and drinking cool water. Our stop was not long. Up again and away we went, crossing the mountains down to the lowlands on the other side where the first camp had been made. Here we stopped for the night, the men chaffing and repeating in strained squeaky voices, "Eulalia, oh, Eulalia." I, too, was repeating that name to myself, and holding dark thoughts of revenge in my mind; a revenge as black as the night which now rose up out of the jungles, enveloping my companions in its oblivion of sleep, while I lay awake thinking and planning.

Morning came, and we were early at work, hurrying to the site where the camp nearest the river would be prepared. Here arrangements were made for sleeping. Sheds were built for the officers, *ranchos* for the men, and now making all haste, we returned to the main camp. When we arrived it was late, but we were immediately taken to the general, for so he had ordered.

"Ha," he said, "you have come in good time; that is, if you have found a road." Briefly my report was made, and he gave me all praise, especially because of my foresight in getting a glimpse of the city and learning its equipment for battle, and he promised me that after I had guided them successfully over the mountains, and the city was taken, I should be made a coronel before all the army.

I was told a strong force of the enemy was on its way up the river, scarcely more than a day from us, but fearing an ambush, were coming on cautiously, and perhaps two days would pass before they reached our camp. Two scouts had come up the river in canoes,

but they had been killed, and no word of us had as yet gone to our enemies. The plan the general had made was that his army, now between five and six hundred men, would be taken over the mountains, leaving a few men in camp to put up a running fight before they retreated to save themselves by hiding in the woods. Thus the attacking party would have reason to believe that the so-called revolution was nothing more than a handful of men, and that these had been utterly routed, the Liberal army dispersed, their camp in the woods reduced to ruin, the few supplies there accumulated captured and taken from them. Then when news had been sent through the country and the Conservatives were all rejoicing, we would make our attack on San Esteban, in a night set up our government, and the revolution would be firmly established.

After I had heard this plan, the general said, "Go now and rest; we start before daylight."

I went gladly, for after a hard day's work, ending with the satisfaction of having accomplished one's purpose, food, rest, and sleep are good, and one enjoys them to the utmost.

CHAPTER XXIX

OVER THE MOUNTAINS

It seemed scarcely an hour before I was called, but in an instant I was on my feet and ready for action. It was yet dark. The air was cool and damp, and a clearness in the sky gave warning that the night was passing. Confusion reigned in the camp, but no one spoke above a whisper, and of drill and order there was none. The general-in-chief stood watching and deciding such questions as were referred to him, and three generals, each in charge of a division of our army, were superintending and giving directions. Besides these officers there were eleven coronels, thirty capitáns, and about ninety or more tenientes, while most of the men were either sergeants or corporals, and in a few months all expected to have commissions.

It is true there were many officers, but is not an army stronger when well officered? An officer can work and fight as well as any one else. Only the generals and coronels did not work; they directed, the coronels carrying the directions of the generals, the capitáns taking the coronels' commands, and the tenientes going about with the men. There was not much order, each officer doing what to him seemed best in the business before us, — to get the supplies moved to canoes, except

such material as would be left behind to deceive the attacking party when they should capture the camp. Orders and papers were left, giving written directions that the general in charge should build a strong camp to prepare for the Liberal Army of Restoration, which in a month or six weeks would come to occupy it, and start the war.

Teniente Garcia, now promoted to a coronel, was to remain with the camp and direct the brief defence, and then taking to the woods, would save himself and his men by hiding and flight. Brave Coronel Garcia, all the officers said; and for my part, I knew, or fancied I knew, that he would run bravely and be a great success at hiding, so I too called him brave Coronel Garcia.

In the swelling light of the morning we pushed our canoes out on the river, in silence starting out on our invasion. I handled a canoe well, and leading the way with the largest, worked with a will, using all my strength, and in about two hours the whole army was brought to the place where I had selected the landing.

Here I stopped, and respectfully saluting the general-in-chief, told him that in the woods we Indians, when we wished to hide our paths, landed on both banks of the river, and hid our canoes, some on one side, some on the other. Then, should our opponents come on the place, they would not know which direction we might have taken. The general approved the stratagem, and the canoes were drawn up as I directed. On the opposite side of the river the banks were trampled down and paths started through the woods, and the canoes hidden. The supplies were all landed on the side where they

should be, and carried back in the woods before any were placed on the ground, so that one bank might not look more disturbed than the other. My ten men and I on the opposite bank made the final arrangements there, and paddled across the river for the last time, carefully hid the light canoe, and then plunging into the woods, found the road we had cut, and imitating the cries of birds, called each party to us. When all were together and the officers had counted the men and had taken record of the supplies, word was given to march, and in high spirits the whole army set out.

It was a formidable expedition, strangely contrasting with the wild undisturbed luxuriance with which we were surrounded, where even one man passing alone would have seemed out of place. For a time we marched in silence. Then word came, "Restrictions withdrawn," and immediately the men began talking, singing and laughing. A hard lot they were, the evil adventurers who lived in the streets of the cities, and a blighting visitation they would be for peaceful San Esteban.

Late in the afternoon we arrived at the first camp, and the men made themselves comfortable. The officers sat down to rest, and the general-in-chief, directing me to stand up, thanked me before the whole army. Pride filled my breast, health glowed on my face, my eyes flashed with courage, my muscles were firm, giving proof of my strength; yes, that day I was at my best, and the spirit of war was my inspiration. Briefly I thanked the general, pledging him faithful courage and service. Then, the Indian spirit of the woods being strong in my veins, I asked permission to take some of the men and go hunting, a request readily granted, for of late

there had been little fresh meat in the camp. Our excursion gave us a fine late afternoon in the woods. Strength which did not tire brought success, and beating through the woods in long lines, we secured game in such abundance that all the camp was put in good humour, and as we returned the men set up a cheering for me, the first acclamation of public applause which I had ever known.

We slept undisturbed, and did not take the trouble to mount sentries, because there was no danger. In the morning we went on to the second camp, and the day following began the work of taking our supplies up the mountains to the camp I had built where we would remain till the time came for our attack.

After some days' work, our entire force reached the top of the mountains, and found the spot I had selected, a perfect place for a camp, and an ideal situation to defend. Here the general thanked me again and made me a coronel, saying that when we reached the city and made a successful attack I deserved to be made a general and to have charge of all the road-building for the revolution.

That night a great calm brooded over the mountains, a deep silence, which sometimes comes at the end of the dry season. The air was motionless almost, scarce a breath stirring, and through the quiet of the evening we heard the sound of church-bells in San Esteban borne to us faintly, and we mocked and blasphemed at the Church. But those among the men who were Masons said we must not blaspheme against God, or any deity, for even the Indians had their gods, and as deities must be respected. So we blasphemed the

Church only, and all made sport as we mimicked the priests.

Our amusement was checked by a shout from down the trail, and presently Coronel Garcia and his men came climbing up to us. Eagerly we crowded about, soliciting news, but he must first report to the general. On his return we learned that two days after the army had left, the camp was attacked, and Garcia said that many of the enemy's men were killed before he and his party were located. They had not waited to withstand a charge, but, according to orders, had sought safety in flight; but being curious to watch the effect, had tarried in hiding and had seen the papers discovered, the camp burned, the supplies taken, and the whole attacking party turn down the river rejoicing at their victory and promising to magnify it for their reward. This would also be for our best interests, for who, after receiving such a report as they would surely give of the utter destruction of the revolutionary forces, could expect an attack on San Esteban?

Publicly thanking Coronel Garcia and promising rewards, the general decided we must attack promptly, for by the next day at the latest the news of the defeat of the revolutionists at the camp on the river would be all over the country. The general sent for me to inquire carefully about the roads and the place for the bivouac down the mountains. He seemed satisfied with what I told him, and on the morrow we were all busy taking supplies for the attack to the lower camp and hiding them there in the woods, for as a matter of precaution we would sleep at the upper camp, because the noise of many people together might

attract attention. The next evening we would go down the mountain, take up the equipment, and in the dead of night march on the city.

All that day the generals were planning together and preparing for the battle. We were to divide in four parties, each entering the city when the church clock rang out two in the morning. The cuartel was to be attacked first, and if we failed to take it, we would throw up barricades in the streets so that the government soldiers might be held in check while we plundered the city. One of the men who were with me when we went to San Esteban grinned and said, "Eulalia, oh, Eulalia! He'll be getting a sight of you now." But I bade him shut his mouth, which he did in short order, for my muscles commanded respect where my orders as an officer might have been held in derision.

We were preparing for battle, but order and drill we did not hold in much regard. The system was always that the generals commanded, the coronels took charge of the fighting, and the other officers were equally divided among them. Each coronel could count on having in his fighting company forty to fifty men and ten or more officers, but in the battle we would all pitch in for blood, and fight about as we pleased till we conquered or the generals called a retreat.

Surely there was excitement and expectancy now in our camp! Who does not love to be in a fight? The lust for blood, when was it ever appeased? We would fight, we would see crimson blood flow in abundance, and later would make love to the women after we had done killing their masters.

Impatient we waited. The time seemed long in coming, but on the next day, when at last the sun was sinking, the order was given and we were off. None dared cheer, but a wavering sigh of excitement of many hearts filled the air, and died away in the light of the sunset. I was a coronel now, and had my original ten men and thirty-two others, with four capitáns and eleven tenientes. We would give a good account of our strength, and were proud to be under the direct command of the general-in-chief.

We reached the lower camp as night was coming on, a haze in the air promising a mantle of darkness to cover our plans. Scouts were despatched, and returning, reported that the way was clear, and so far as they could ascertain, the city was all unsuspecting. Now there was nothing to do but wait. The general ordered that all should sleep for a time, and calling me, put me in charge as officer of the night, directing that when the church clock rang out the hour of twelve, he should be called.

CHAPTER XXX

TAKING THE CITY

I WELCOMED the order; sleep was not for me. Thoughts of the past were in my mind, of José wronged and cursing my memory, of pledges broken, of hopes shattered. The night, the dark night of my revenge, was now at hand, and the morrow, the bright day of triumph for those who fought bravely. Before me lay the road and the trail from San Esteban over the mountains and down to our village, where after a time I knew my messengers would be hurrying from Joaquín to his father José, restoring all which was lost. Triumph would soon be mine, and why should one seek revenge when one by his own strength had righted his wrongs? I thought of Eulalia, beautiful Eulalia; she did not know of our common blood in Don Ignacio's family, nor was the relationship close enough to be an impediment. Eulalia should be my principal woman. I would take her away from Don Ignacio, if need be, take her by force. And Don Ignacio, he would be ruined; no more could he trouble our village. His money would be for me and for others.

In the midst of these thoughts the vibrating sounds of a great church-bell, heard from the distance tolling the hour, came swelling, and pausing, and lingering,

and swelling again through the trees. I counted the strokes, nine, ten, eleven, twelve! The hour had come! Action, to action! A wild pulse thrilled my body, I called the general, and then began awakening the men. All knew what was coming, all leaped to prepare for the combat. Scarce a word was spoken. The coronels gathered their men together, arms were inspected, and the report to the commanding general stated that all were ready. Each general took his division, and we started, groping our way at first, because in the woods it was dark; then out into the fields, silent fields, serenely calm beneath the pallid light of the stars shining dimly through the haze which hung in the air. In the distance banks of sickly white clouds and fog lay thick on the mountains, and at intervals flashes of fitful lightning went quivering among them.

Before us a dark shapeless mass loomed up in the midst of the fields, the city of San Esteban, all unsuspecting, silent and sleeping. Thither we now urged our steps; the moment we had long waited was approaching. A group of houses suddenly appeared in our path, huts of the labourers, but all were silent, the owners sound in their sleep. We came out on the road and could distinctly see the lines of the buildings in the city before us. We were passing a house, — a dog howled and fled away growling and barking. A light flashed in a window, a horrified cry came out on the night, "The Liberals, the Atheists!" Then all was still. Four men were sent to take charge of the house, and as they approached it, the door opened and a little Spanish boy, naked, not having stopped to put on his clothes, came out, crying, "I'll run and give the alarm. They

can't catch me, and they don't dare fire their guns." Like a frightened fawn he fled down the road.

Little boy, little boy, as straight as an arrow, and as audacious as only a Spaniard can be audacious and daring, you never knew before how an Indian could run. What was it? A giant who now overtook you, and caught you up in his arms, arms such as the men of your country never could equal? What was it that put a great hand on your mouth and choked you a little that you might not cry out? You thought it the devil, and gave your trembling promise that you would not make any noise and give the alarm. But you could not go back; you had to go on with the soldiers. The great giant picked you up and tucked you under his arm as if you had no weight at all, and you whispered, "I thought that all the Liberals were terribly wicked and came to kill everybody," and the great hand was on your throat in an instant. You were not afraid, but nestling close, made yourself comfortable, and with wondering eyes waited to see what might be coming.

Now the city was close before us, the army was halted. The generals consulted a moment, and decided that, as there had been a partial alarm, we would proceed at once to the attack; we would go as one body and attempt to surround the cuartel. I still carried the boy, not daring to let him go, and only caressed him a little when a coronel suggested that the best thing would be to kill him.

We entered the city. At the first houses no police officer waited, though one should have been there. Keeping well in the shadow, we undisturbed now made all haste toward the cuartel.

"Who goes there?" came a voice from within an open doorway, and then a gurgling groan, and we knew that a policeman had fallen.

On just a few squares farther, and the cuartel was in sight. The general commanding sent a whispered order calling a halt. At the door of the cuartel a guard was standing, five men and a teniente, half asleep, and evidently all unsuspicious, for they had not seen us, as we were well in the shadow. Now the order came to advance and turn down a side-street, — successfully accomplished! Still unobserved, we were behind the cuartel. Now the army separated, one half to go around each side of the block, and coming up in front of the cuartel, we would rush the attack.

Quickly and without any words each party went forward; none paused an instant. As we came rounding the two sides of the block, we charged, a silent deadly attack. There was an instant of suspense, broken only by the sound of onrushing feet, quick shots from the guards, a groaning cry, a struggle, — a guard overpowered and butchered, — a swarming into the cuartel, a charge for the stairs, — the arms were not on the first floor as we had expected, — a shouting of orders, a sudden flashing of light and cracking of shots from above, men falling, blood spouting, and the next instant the force of numbers overpowered: the cuartel was ours. I had been first in the attack, and some said that but for my judgment in falling flat when I saw that shots were to be fired down the stairs, followed by my springing on the enemy with all my great strength and beating a way for our men to advance, the fight would have been lost. Had

a volley been fired down on us, or had a cannon been brought into action, we would have been butchered, — we did not know that we were attacking a two-story cuartel. On such chances as these hang the fate of battles.

The surrender was made, the government arms all secured, guards quickly mounted; and just in time, for now from all parts of the city cries of alarm and shouts of encouragement came for those who had lately been the defenders, and a police regiment came charging to the soldiers' assistance. A rifle-shot from the cuartel picked off the leader, who fell down and rolled over before his men. A moment they hesitated, and at that instant a company of our men, who had crept around the square, with shouts charged on them from behind, and the police company surrendered. In truth, what else could they do? They were not armed for battle.

The city was ours, and companies of men were sent to take charge of the government offices and arrest all officials. The telegraph-lines had been cut as we came in the city, and now we took charge of the offices. Word could not be sent, and two days must pass before news of our victory could reach other cities; we could make ourselves strong, and then await the attack. Some of our men were for looting the city at once, but the general gave strict orders that this would not be allowed. The fruits of the victory must be justly shared and divided, he said, and the men knew that he must be obeyed, for though the pomp of parade was not much in our army, all knew that the general would instantly order the death of any who transgressed

his commands. Now out of the chorus of shoutings, counsellings, and opinions, order and quiet were gradually established, and, though some grumbled, all obeyed, and expectant waited for morning.

It occurred to me to look after the boy I had carried and dropped at the side of the cuartel just as our attacking party was about to go forward. I had directed him to wait there for me, and now went to see what had become of him. There he was, the little naked boy, shivering and crying. Cold little chap, he sprang forward to meet me, and then drew back; how could he have trust in a Liberal? "Señor Devil," he begged, "can I please go home?" He still thought I was the devil, and there was no need to tell him that it was not so.

"I'll send you home in a moment, but first I must get you some clothes."

"Take gifts from the devil?" and he drew up his naked little form and looked defiance at me.

"Well, the soldiers will see that you do not go home naked. You will take some clothes from a soldier?"

"Yes, and I am very cold," was all that he said.

I wanted to carry the boy to the cuartel, but he would not allow me to touch him. One of my men chanced that way, and I sent for a coat and other things from the supplies captured with the cuartel. Soon my chance acquaintance was equipped in drummer-boy's outfit, and given coffee to drink and chocolate balls to eat, was quite contented, and well at his ease, but anxious to start for his home, assuring us he was not afraid to go back alone.

"What's your name," I asked, "and who's your father?"

"My name is Vicente, and," with a ring of pride in his voice, "my father is Don Ignacio, the rich rubber merchant, and my mother is a good woman who works in his fields. Now can I go?"

Had it been light, people would have wondered how I started on hearing these words, and stood staring at him. Then, scarcely heeding how or what I replied, I said, "Yes, you can go," and without waiting a second permission, the boy turned and ran quickly away in the night.

CHAPTER XXXI

DON IGNACIO'S HOUSE

SURELY now I deserved some rest, and being wearied in body, and, at the boy's words, troubled in spirit, I sought a place to sleep, after first, as was my duty, reporting to the officer in charge. In a corner of the cuartel, in an upper room, I stretched myself out on the floor and rested, sleeping as only a tired man sleeps after great exertion.

Next morning I was not among the first to be up, but tarried asleep longer than was my custom. The general had sent word that I should not be disturbed; so when I finally came down to the first floor of the cuartel I heard that the business of the morning was well under way. The general and the principal Liberals of the city were arranging the administration of the district which had now come under our control. Evidently they were making good progress, and all were well pleased, because on taking charge of the municipal treasury the soldiers had found on hand the full quarterly collection of taxes which had just been completed, and at the church also a goodly supply of money had been found, which was of course confiscated when the priests were arrested. With these funds there was enough to pay off the army, and the generals were

enabled to announce to the people that no contributions would be required, and a grandiloquent address was prepared extolling the Liberal party and directing all people to be obedient to it. Another proclamation was being written, calling on all men who could bear arms to present themselves at the cuartel to be enrolled for the defence of the city.

Word was now brought that the general commanding had sent to call me, and without delay I obeyed the summons. On entering the room I saluted respectfully, and waited to hear the business on which I was wanted. To my surprise, the general got up from his chair and shook me by the hand, afterwards embracing me in the manner of Spanish people when greeting their equals. I returned his affectionate addresses, and he introduced me to the principal men in the room, telling them how the campaign had been won largely because of my prompt energy in building the road; a road which would later be of great value to San Esteban when the war was concluded. Turning again to me, he said, "You are the youngest coronel in the Liberal Army of Restoration, but you deserve still higher honours. Here is your commission, General Joaquín Buenevento. You are appointed to study the roads of the district and find such means as can be promptly had for quick and secret communication with different parts of the valley. The work must be urged with all haste, for soon a great battle will be fought; the Conservatives will not let us remain long undisturbed. Sit down, general, and join in our council."

Attentively I listened to all their plans, but for myself said little. My thoughts were with them and all on

the present, yet sometimes my fancy turned to José and how he would at last receive me again, and I thought sometimes of how I would later go down to our village and bring up a company of Indian men to fight for the Restoration and equal rights.

After the council had finished, the gentlemen who had come to consult with the generals offered their houses, that each general might have a separate place for his headquarters. For myself, I did not accept their invitations, saying to them, "If it may be, I have a particular reason for occupying the house of Don Ignacio, the rubber merchant."

"Ha, ha," the visitors laughed in a chorus, calling out, "Bravo, young blood, and the most beautiful girl. Well, the city is yours, do as you will."

"You speak truly," I replied, "yet I have another reason. I am an Indian, and in our village we have suffered much from this Don Ignacio. If it may be, I will quarter myself in his house."

"General, all the houses are at your orders," an old señor said. "Here Don Ignacio is not too much beloved. Call your guard and we'll show you the house."

An offer like this I was not slow in accepting, and shortly we were standing before the house where a few days previous Eulalia had appeared like a vision when I first passed through the city. All was silence. Don Ignacio was not at home, nor would he dare to return while the Liberals were in San Esteban. Close-barred were the windows, the great door wedged fast on its hinges; no signs of life. A loud summons on the door echoed through the silent rooms, but no answer came in response.

"We must break in," I cried, impatient.

"Yes, that will stir them up," the old señor answered.

A sharp order from me, and my men went hurrying to the cuartel to bring great, battering hammers used to break down heavy doors. While we were waiting, I fancied that a beautiful, a scornfully beautiful eye peeped through a slit in one of the windows, but I could not be sure; and now came my men hurrying, and a crowd was collecting.

Taking a great mallet in my hands, which usually required two men to use it, I swung it over my head, and sent a blow crashing down on the door, which caused it to yield somewhat, and set the whole building a trembling. From within came shrieks of terror and a sound of hurrying feet, then silence again. Now I rapped on the door, and commanded that those within should open to us.

A clear, calm voice replied, "I am here alone, only a poor maiden with no protector. If you seek Don Ignacio, my uncle, he is not here, thanks to the Virgin. Now begone, I cannot receive you."

"Begone, do you say? I am General Buenevento, the Indian. I come to quarter myself in your house."

"Santa Rosa and the Virgin protect me! Begone, you coward! Shame on the name of your mother! Begone!" and her voice screamed with passionate anger. "Coward, to assault the house where a girl is alone. There are men in the city who will avenge such an insult."

"Señorita," I replied, "your friends are in jail. A coward does not turn back when he would win a

woman's attentions. I am about to enter your house. Shall I break in, or will you have the door opened?"

Then I heard her say, "Guillermo, open the door. Let in those men and see that they are well attended." Slowly the locks were undone, and with a low bow an elderly man swung back the door and bade us enter in the name of his absent master. Without more ceremony we crowded into the house, but Eulalia, where was she? I had no time to look now; my first care was to dispose of my soldiers, and presently found good quarters for them on the lower floor. At the back of the house a second story had been built, which evidently was used by the women, and I did not disturb it.

The crowd of people who had come in from the streets were ordered out, and the old señor went with me to Don Ignacio's salon, one of my soldiers mounting guard at the door. Guillermo brought liquors of various kinds and some good cigars; evidently Don Ignacio lived well. We took the precaution to make the old servant taste each of the liquors and smoke one of the cigars, and from his eager compliance were satisfied that no poison had been prepared for us. The old señor, Don Ramón Landonas, was a strong Liberal and Mason, and a former general who had been through many bitterly contested battles. He and I sat talking a long time, he giving me much good advice, and many useful hints in regard to my actions in the battle which must soon decide the fate of the city. Finally Guillermo came to say that *almuerzo* was waiting. I urged Don Ramón to stop with me, but he decided to go to his own house, and I must eat alone.

At the door I gave him my respectful thanks, and

adiós, and then went in to have the late breakfast, hoping that Eulalia would be there to greet me. In this I was disappointed, and questioning Guillermo, bade him go and say that I would speak with her, and desired her presence to grace the table.

Word came back that ladies did not eat with strange men, especially when their protectors were absent. This was a new phase of life to me. I had never met a lady. The women I knew came to table readily enough when they were summoned, and our women would have been glad to eat with the men, but they were not allowed. Was she mocking me or was she speaking the truth? To me it seemed that she was mocking, and with an angry command I bade Guillermo go and tell his mistress that General Buenevento ordered her to appear in the dining-hall. Word came back that I might kill the young lady, if such were my pleasure, but that not even under the pain of death for refusing would she come to sit at the table with me.

This was indeed a novel situation. Here was a woman, young and more beautiful than any I had ever known, who refused my advances. I, who before had but to nod at a woman and make a conquest, I, whom all women declared to be without peer, and in their eyes stronger and more excellently handsome than any other man in the world, was mocked at and scorned by a woman. I would not allow it. I strode out of the dining-hall and went straight to the stairs which I knew led to her apartments; not a moment of hesitation, but a trampling of heavy feet resounded as I mounted the stairs.

At the top, a long corridor balcony opened from the

landing, and at the end stood she whom I sought. Erect and proud she was, but the pallor of death set on her face, in her left hand a crucifix, in her right a pistol, her great eyes flashing defiance.

"Señor, stay your ardour. This pistol is not to do you any harm, but come one step nearer, and I kill myself before your hand can touch me."

Low was her voice, but determined. This was what I had heard of but never believed in, a good woman. How like a goddess she looked, how radiantly beautiful, and yet how pale and distressed, but unflinching. I stopped. How could I go on? Yet, I longed to embrace her; but I knew, by the token of a terrible purpose expressed in her face, that should I step forward it would be to meet a corpse. I stood still, and she, pale and defiant, at the end of the corridor, stood looking steadily at me. Here was a barrier force could not break down, a woman who would choose death rather than suffer dishonour.

For a time I stood undecided, and all the while she remained looking at me and waiting. To Death's embrace she would yield, to mine — I knew it was useless, and, defeated and awed by the strength of her virtue, I yielded completely and, bowing low, said, "Señorita, may it be that at some future time my presence may not be to you so offensive."

"When you come as a gentleman and not as a ruffian I may receive you, and now, sir, begone; a woman's apartments may not be invaded."

Bowing low I turned to go down the stairs, but on looking back an instant, saw the beautiful creature prostrate on her knees, crying and trembling, while she

kissed the crucifix held in her hands. Subdued, I went to the dining-hall, and had *almuerzo* alone, where in fancy I had pictured myself with beautiful, stately Eulalia as my companion. Presently I had eaten enough, and going out in the courtyard, met a woman on her way to the upper corridor.

"What are you seeking?" I asked of her, sternly.

"I seek the Señorita Eulalia, I am her companion and servant."

"Not so. She shall live alone."

"I protest. Good general, be merciful; she is a young woman alone. I beseech of you let me go to her."

"You heard my commands. She shall live alone."

"But she must have food."

"I will take it to her myself."

"Oh, oh!" and the woman wrung her hands in despair. "Oh, my poor Eulalia! Eulalia, do you hear, I cannot come to you. Destruction, oh, destruction at the hands of these Liberals has overcome us all."

"Here, teniente," I called to one of the officers on my staff, "put this woman out, and see that no one approaches the Señorita Eulalia. We will see what hunger will do for her and her fine notions."

With an appealing look of reproach the woman hurried out of the house, and the teniente set a guard at the foot of the stairs. Perhaps my fine lady would come down to the dining-hall in the evening.

CHAPTER XXXII

HUNGER

THE city and valley of San Esteban were surrounded by mountains, two long ranges, one on either side, and at the terminals of the valley these two ranges came together, forming an interior stretch of level ground entirely shut in from the outer world. A single road led into the valley, and traversing its whole length, mounted up the interior range, and then led over the mountains to other valleys. Except for these passes over the mountains, no means of communication, no way in or out of the valley, was open. As a consequence we had only two points to defend; for the rest the mountains were defence enough. Our plan was to have men ready to contest the advance of any army which might attack us, and to meet them at the brow of the ridge, and then if they beat our men back, I would have two trails prepared curving out from the main road, and going up the mountains on either side of it till they joined the road again at the top of the ridge. On these trails companies of our men could, unobserved, climb up the mountains, and turning out on the ridge, would be behind our enemies, and though they should beat us back at first, victory would surely be ours when our men closed in to attack the rear.

This plan was eagerly approved by my superior officers; the only question was, could I open the trails in time to help the defence? The mountains were rough and difficult; yet knowing the ready ease, almost instinct, with which Indians found trails where to all others the way would seem hopeless, my superiors gave their approval and directed that I should first prepare the trails for the southeastern entrance to the valley. There the first attack might be expected, though strong armies would come down from the interior and we must prepare for a defence at the northern entrance as well.

That afternoon I went out to the south, where the road came down to the valley of San Esteban. Here, by turning back along the ridge, I found a way to the top, and from there it was easy to get to the road. I marked the trees where the path should be cut, but not way out, for that would have betrayed our plans. I left the men at work there, and then went to the other side of the road and searched on that side for a way to the top of the ridge. The ground was rough and broken, and no way seemed possible except close to the road or on a rough, open hillside beyond the rocks, where the men would have been in plain sight of an enemy occupying the main road. There was no route available except by going along the base of the mountains, and then cutting a path to and across the top of the ridge, thence along the outer side to the road, coming out at a point a little beyond the crest of the pass. This trail was longer, but in the case of a stubborn resistance, and a protracted contest on the top of the ridge, would be useful in that it would permit companies of our men

to obtain a foothold further in the rear of an attacking army.

My work at this end of the valley had been easier than we had expected, and my superiors were filled with enthusiasm when I reported to them. Men were detailed to cut out the trails, and in the morning I would go and explore at the northern end of the valley; now I would go back to the house and see Eulalia, that is, if by this time she were hungry enough to accept my attentions.

Hurrying on my way, I reflected with some satisfaction that even if she held out during the night, in the morning she must come down to the dining-hall; because elsewhere she would not be allowed anything to eat, — of that I was determined. Impatient that I had been so long deprived of a presence which, because it was denied me, became the thing I most ardently desired, I went to the stairs leading to my lady's apartments. A cry of dismay was my only greeting, and there, standing as before, pistol in one hand, crucifix in the other, was Eulalia, tall, proud, and supremely beautiful, her pale face touched by the light of the sunset, its fire reflecting the fire of her own eyes flashing defiance and scorn.

"How dare you intrude here again? Is not all the rest of the house enough for your wants?"

"Enough for my needs, but not for my wants, most beautiful Eulalia. I would have you as well."

"Power has made you insolent, else you would not dare address me in such words."

"My lady, your charms make of me whatever you will. Come to me, let me enjoy your presence," and

I made a movement as if I would go to her, but the pistol raised to her beautiful head stayed my feet.

"But you must be hungry," I continued. "Guillermo has food prepared in the dining-hall. Come there with me."

"To you I owe my hunger, and I am hungry, but it were better to die of hunger than to be exposed to such as you. Begone! What you plead is useless."

"Then go hungry still longer; to-morrow your mind will be in a different mood," and, suiting my action to my words, I turned abruptly away and went down to the dining-hall, ordering the guard to keep close watch on the stairs that none might go up and no one might come down.

A bountiful dinner which Guillermo had prepared was waiting for me, and I was hungry because of my vigorous work in searching out trails in the mountains, and was prepared to do full justice to the food which had been supplied me. With an eager appetite I began, thoroughly enjoying myself and the food, and finding many causes for congratulation.

Eulalia, I was pretty well assured, would tolerate me in the morning; by that time hunger would be a vigorous ally to my aspirations. The more I thought of her the more I wanted to see her, and from wanting to see her I fell to wondering how she might be enduring the ordeal of hunger. I did not like it myself when I had to go hungry; she could not like it. I was sorry, and yet I was selfish. I wanted her with me, yet I was sorry. Then I felt sympathy, then I wanted to serve her, and the next instant I was gathering up the choicest plates of food, and having arranged a supply such as I

knew would please a woman, that is, would please such women as I knew, I found myself on the stairs seeking again her apartments with a supply of food more than abundant.

Reaching the top of the stairs I made her a low salutation, saying, "Señorita, no other hand but my own may bring food to you, but as you find my presence distasteful I leave it here and retire at once."

"Caballero," I heard a low voice answer, "I thank you, though I thank you more for your respect in retiring than for the food."

Angry I was, and displeased with myself too. Why should she thank me for food which was her own? Why should she thank me to leave? No woman before had ever done this, but in time, if the revolution prospered, and it was prospering, I would change her way of thinking. In silence I ate my dinner; then leaving an officer on guard, went out to enjoy myself in the city. I found plenty of women and young girls eager to talk and be with me, and it was late when I returned to sleep at Don Ignacio's house. As yet I had not taken time to examine his papers, but I would do this by and by; there would be plenty of time later, while now every effort was strained to prepare for the battle which must soon take place.

Next morning I went to my lady's stairs, but with no better success than on my first efforts to approach her, so went to the cuartel and prepared for the work of the day. My first care was to examine one of the better cannon, and though it was of great weight, I could lift it and with some effort get it up on my back. This was a strong point for defence or attack. I could

by straining and effort carry it up one of my secret trails to the rear of the enemy when they attacked, and we had them fighting with our men at the crest of the ridge; in the heat of the battle I could then strike with blighting force in an unexpected and little-defended quarter. I explained my plan to the general-in-chief, who eagerly approved, wondering at my strength, and I was proud.

Orders were given and the gun made ready to be dragged to whatever point the enemy might first attack, and the best gunner in the army was detailed to serve after I had carried the gun to its position for harassing the enemy. Other men were detailed to carry ammunition, and the general said our victory was assured. I noticed now that wherever I went the men set up a cheering, and I took pleasure in being among them and encouraging them in return. The battle we were all eager for was coming, and our thirst to see fresh human blood grew as the hours accumulated and brought the time nearer.

About noon time I went to the place where my trails were being cut; the work was almost finished and the plan would be a success. I examined the ground and determined where I would set up the cannon, looking carefully at the points which might be covered from either trail, for whether I would carry the gun up the left or the right side of the road would depend on how the enemy might dispose their forces. Without more delay, I started returning to the city, intending to begin work on the other trails, to have them ready should the enemy attack us on the northern side of the valley.

CHAPTER XXXIII

VICENTE

I WAS returning to the cuartel, walking vigorously but on the way tarried a little on reaching the house where I knew Don Ignacio's son was living, the boy I had picked up and then saved from harm on the night of our attack on the city. He was standing in front of the house and looked at me in defiance. I waved my hand to him and called out "Good day!" But he gave no friendly response, and his brow darkened with a frown as he said, "You bad, wicked man, I hate you."

"How's that?" I replied, stopping with the intention to tease and perhaps frighten him a little.

"You have my Eulalia a prisoner, that's why I hate you."

"Oh, that's it, and do you love Eulalia?"

"She is of our family. Of course I love her."

"And does she love you?"

"No, she's proud, always proud. But she's good and kind all the time, and with every one too. Sometimes she goes to my father's house and serves her."

"So—" I exclaimed, an idea coming in my mind. "I don't want any woman companions with her, how would you like to go with me and serve her now?"

"Why don't you let her go free?"

"Because I want her myself."

"She would never have a devil-man and a Liberal."

"Well, we'll see about that; but you come with me and serve her."

"You can't make me, and I'm not afraid of you, not one bit," and he picked up a big stone as if he would hurl it at me; but I had now come close to him, and before he could throw it, picked the little chap up and was carrying him off. At this a great outcry arose in the house that the devil-man was carrying off Vicente, but the boy was neither alarmed nor disturbed. He only called back to his mother:

"The devil-man wants me to go serve Eulalia, and to get me he must carry me every step of the way," and at this he gave me a vigorous kick, and bade me go on. The mother made no further objections, and I, laughing at the situation, took the little boy's abuse with good nature, and deliberately carried him off, to the great amusement of all who saw us. While he scolded and told me plainly what he thought of all Liberals and his small regard for me in particular, I brought him to Don Ignacio's house and bade him run to serve his Mistress Eulalia, promising a good spanking if he were not good.

"Don't you know you couldn't spank me?" he cried, as he dodged my hand, and made off for the Señorita Eulalia's apartments.

"Why couldn't I spank you?" I called after him, just as he was reaching the stairs.

He paused, looking at me as he said, "You're only a devil-man, and I'd make the sign of the cross where you'd spank, then you couldn't hurt me at all." And

to further emphasize his poor opinion of me, he put his thumb to his nose and wiggled his fingers derisively. Then a sudden expression of pleasure came over his face, and running back to where I stood, he said, "But you're awfully handsome and strong," and giving a caressing pat on my arm, he bounded away, looked back over his shoulder, waved his hand to me, and then went two steps at a time up to the Señorita's apartments, calling out, "Eulalia, my Eulalia! It's Vicente. I've come to take care of you!" and I knew by the joy in her voice at his welcome, that he was receiving caresses which I longed to have, yet in my rough nature knew not how to obtain.

"The sign of the cross," I had once valued that sign myself; now I gave it but little regard, and in truth I was fighting against it. Little Vicente would be disillusioned when his time came, and though the sign of the cross might be good, the Church had a sting and the sting made us fight.

The contest was soon coming, the fight would be on, and preparations were steadily continued. In the days that followed I continued working to make the roads, and the general-in-chief was laying plans, and arranging the government of the district which we had conquered. Money was not lacking, neither were men, for many came to join our standard, and with each day our position grew stronger.

While we were waiting I had more time on my hands, and often now strenuously solicited Eulalia's favour, but always the results were the same. A prisoner I might keep her if I would, but she would not let me approach her. I knew she meant what she said, and I had

some regard for her and this stayed my act. Once or twice I went softly at night, but found her door securely fastened. I could have forced it, my strength was more than sufficient, but I wanted her willing in spirit. What could I do? The situation was more than mere strength and daring could master.

With time Vicente came to have a warm attachment for me; surely strength and daring are always to a boy a cause of attraction. I well remember one night when I came in late as usual, for I was leading a gay life in the city, and I had just lain down with my sheet wrapped about me, when the door was pushed a little way open and Vicente slipped in and closed it softly behind him. He threw his clothes off in an instant, and with a light spring was in bed with me, saying, "Don General, I am come to keep you company; give me part of your sheet to cover me and we will sleep *compañeros*." Without waiting permission, he crept under the cover and was close at my side, making himself comfortable with me. Thus it was we became *compañeros*. During the days that followed, he was for ever with me when I would permit him, most proud when I would allow him to carry my sword, and he even proposed to accompany me when the battle was come, so that he might take care of me. In his opinion we would all be killed at once, and though he was satisfied that I ought to perish with the rest of our wicked army, he thought it would be best that he should go and protect me, because, after all, he did not want me to be killed.

One day as I went to the cuartel, Vicente close at my heels, a priest plucked me by the arm. He was one of the prisoners, for all the priests were held in restraint,

and turning, I recognized one of the humble men in brown whom I had seen long ago on that eventful night when I first began my studies. What a long time it seemed! What terrible changes had come! I, who was then pulsating with hopes and ambitions, was now burning in hatred, my soul thirsting only for vengeance. At times when active work commanded attention the burning died out for awhile; still always it surged up again, and my hate would not be appeased. It must drink deep in revenge ere I could forget.

"Are you not the youth whom I called the beautiful tempter not two years gone past at St. Joseph's School?" the priest asked. "Have you forgotten, so quickly forgotten, that life?"

"Not forgotten, I can never forget! There are stripes on my back which will ever be burning. I hear the cries of a man being, as it were, tortured to death, and I feel again the bitter anguish once suffered when I found all was a lie to deceive me. I was betrayed, I had betrayed, and I hear again the voice of my people who bayed in my face. Priest, speak not to me, if you hold your life dear!" and I turned on my heel; but little Vicente knelt and asked for his blessing.

The general-in-chief was near, and said to me, "You are not alone in your hate; all in the army have some cause against the priests. We have nearly a score of them prisoners, and when the battle comes we will march them out in front of our army and let them see what a bullet is like."

"A splendid revenge," I replied, "when their own friends shoot them down."

"Yes, and the time is at hand," the general continued,

as we reached headquarters. "To-morrow, or, at the latest, the day after, will see the enemy upon us. At daybreak to-morrow we must take up our positions and prepare our defence."

At this information a throb of delight ran through my veins, and an intense activity of mind and feelings followed; nor was I the only one thus excited. Men were cheering, and rations and ammunition were being packed and made ready. I had little to do; it only remained for me to inspect the secret roads, and in the morning I would take the cannon we had captured with the cuartel and go to the place where we would meet the enemy, there to await the attack. It was a long, busy day at our headquarters, and I lent a hand wherever I could, helping the others, my great strength an advantage all esteemed in the heavy exertions of our preparations.

At night I went back to the house, determined that now, on the eve of the coming battle, I would have a closer acquaintance with the *Señorita Eulalia*. At the foot of her stairs I found Vicente, saucy and handsome, his round face, big, dark eyes, and full, sensitive mouth all aglow with excitement, while his dark curly hair was tumbled more than was usual.

"I kissed her, that's what I did," he called out as I came toward him. "Don't you wish you were me?" Waving his hand he ran lightly up the stairs to her rooms, and I, determining to make my last effort, followed eagerly after. Calmly she stood at the foot of the corridor. She was drooping somewhat and paler than when I had first seen her, but there was no change in her mode of reception.

1

"Caballero, your ambitions are hopeless," she said.
"Approach me, and you know how it will end."

"Beautiful Eulalia," I cried, "your coldness is cruel to put this barrier between us."

"Your own acts put a barrier between us."

"Have I not sought you humbly?"

"To seek humbly, that is not enough."

"What have I done to offend you? Why are you so proud and so cruel?"

"Because I see by your face that you come to seek me in lust, not in honour."

"What is honour in seeking a beautiful woman? Men seek and follow after them always."

"Yes, truly, I know, but all do not force a way to one's house."

"Had I not done so you would not have even thought of me."

"Had you come to my window, in time I might have known you. I will not say that one so strong and valiant might not, among the weaklings who nightly came to my window, win my honourable regard and the respect of Don Ignacio, my protector."

"And may I still hope for your affections?"

"Not here. Never here. Restore my house to me, make no effort to come except at my window, and the rest must depend on Don Ignacio, my uncle, and on your good behaviour."

How impossible that I should appeal to Don Ignacio she knew not, yet her honour, and the knowledge that she would sacrifice her life to protect it, held me in check. I might have obtained help, I might have sent women to disarm her, I might have taken her in

violence, but what use would that have been? She would have killed herself by some means or other. I could not seek after her as she would have me; the gulf between Don Ignacio and myself was impassable. Yet I was determined that I would take her away from him. Regard for her, affection for her, for now it was affection, mingled with hatred for him, made me determined, and yet what could I do? She held me in check, and no way appeared to overcome her and accomplish my purpose. I think that all the time I was in the house she stood on her guard, and the conditions seemed hopeless that I should of myself persuade her.

I scarcely knew what were my intentions. She was so beautiful, more lovely than any woman I had ever seen. They say that all in Don Ignacio's family were well favoured. Surely this was the truth, for there was Eulalia and little Vicente; and for myself I had reason to be proud of my strength and appearance.

After the battle was over I meant to go back to my people triumphant, and Eulalia would be part of my triumph. I would not give her up, I was determined to win her. For the present I was defeated, or, rather, bided defeat to gain victory later, and now after these meditations during which I had been steadily gazing upon her, I bowed low in obeisance and said, "Señorita, your words wound, and yet lead my heart to hope. I leave you, but I hope to return."

A mocking laugh came from little Vicente as he called out, "Yes, go on down-stairs. You can't come in here."

The suggestion was taken, I followed his bidding, and went down to prepare for the battle. I wondered as I

went why Eulalia did not try to escape, and then on second thoughts I knew that she was safer where she was, and a glow filled my heart at the thought that perhaps she trusted me more than the others.

That night when I was in bed little Vicente came to me as usual, but on demanding his place at my side, he put his arms about my neck for an instant, and whispered, "Say, she likes you almost as much as I like you myself."

Later, to my astonishment, he began to tell me all our secret plans for the battle. In childish delight he let his tongue run free, reciting details and mimicking the officers' voices in a manner which would have been amusing had it not been alarming when I thought of the danger should our arrangements become generally known.

"Vicente," I exclaimed, sitting up in bed, "where did you hear all this?"

"I've got a way. Do you think I am going to tell you?"

"But Vicente, you must tell or I will have to spank you well if you don't."

"Yes, you spank me," and he laid his head on my arm, nestling close to my side. "Go ahead, I'm not afraid of your spankings."

"Vicente," I said, "this is a serious matter. If you are not afraid of my spankings, I must report you to the commander-in-chief."

"A telltale. I wouldn't be that."

"I may have to be. Come, tell me, and we will keep the secret together."

"All right. I heard them myself."

"How did you hear them?"

"That's telling. We've got one secret together and now you want two."

"But Vicente, I must know all the secret. Tell me now, how did you hear them?"

"I've got a secret place where I can hear and see all that they do."

This was all he would tell me, though he promised he would not tell any one what he heard. Knowing that the consultation-room could be changed after the battle, but that now it was too late for our plans to be rearranged, I bade him go to sleep, and for a long time I myself lay awake thinking. Events were now rapidly culminating. In two or three days, my good fortune continuing, I would regain all I had lost, and on my demands our rubber forests would be restored to me and I could go back to José and my own people, — and I would take Eulalia with me.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE BATTLE

NEXT morning the call came to arms, and we went out to fight. All the people of the city came crowding to see us; women were saying farewell to the men, for each soldier had made associations of some kind in the city, and on me many attentions were showered. How I wished Eulalia might be there with the others, yet perhaps if she had been like them I would not have given a passing care to her. As it was, she was chief in my thoughts, even though cheers and applause greeted my presence wherever I went, and elation swelled up in my heart. Had I been older I would have kept an eye on the generals, but I had no experience with politics and army intrigues. Were we not zealous all for the cause? The generals could not but approve when I helped, and it did not occur to me that a man could become too popular.

We were soon out of the city, the men marching along in rather irregular order, and the officers, mobbing together, tramped at the side of the column. Orders were many, but the men knew where they were going and went directly on without paying much attention. Some few of the principal officers were mounted, but most of them were on foot with the men. Since our

arrival in San Esteban the army had grown, and now we had about sixteen hundred men and some five hundred officers, but between the men and the officers there really was not much difference. We all went to fight, only more was expected from the officers than the men.

At noon we reached the mountains on the southern side of the valley. The enemy was coming up from the coast, and some of our men went to the top of the ridge to defend the pass, while I busied myself at the secret roads, and put the cannon in place so that it would be conveniently ready to carry up either side as required.

The general-in-chief, riding a really beautiful horse, carried his years with ease. Though gray from many campaigns, he was still erect and vigorous, a fine man to look at, only his face was cruel; cold, black eyes, marring the expression where otherwise a massive forehead, firm mouth, aggressive nose, and broad face, would have made him noticeably handsome. His horse was black, his uniform brilliant, and now he rode to the fore of his men to explain his plan for the battle and make them an address. With a cheer, all crowded forward and waited. For a moment there was deep silence, then, in a strong, resonant voice, he began:

"Soldiers, companions in arms, my fellows struggling and aspiring for freedom and for our holy cause to rid our beloved Republic from its oppressors, the hour of trial, to be followed by the long day of achievement, is now at hand. Here we will fight, here on these mountains rising like altars on high, our blood shall hallow our cause; fit altars these mountains, towering

as our aspirations are towering, strong as our cause is strong, enduring as freedom shall ever endure after we are triumphant. Our courage, too, is as strong as the mountains, yet if by chance there are cowards amongst us let them now turn back ere we go forward." The general paused for a moment, and then continued: "There are none. Our watchword is forward! Forward for ever! Harken and I will tell you the plan of the battle — " but he could not continue because of the cheering and wild acclamations. When his voice could be heard he went on: "Part of our men will occupy the crest of the pass over the mountains, and by way of that pass must come the enemy who would attack us. Some of our men there placed will contest the advance; others will occupy either side of the road, and if the first defenders are forced back these reserves will come forward, and if the way is forced down to the valley, the large reserve from our army will fall on the intruders and part will go up the secret paths and attack from the rear. Our brave *compañero*, General Buenevento," — at these words the wildest cheerings came in a mighty volume of approbation, the men continuing their demonstration and stopping only at last to hear what more might be said, — "Our brave *compañero*," continued the general, "whose great strength towers high in our cause, will carry the cannon up the mountains to the best point of vantage where he can destroy the enemy who dares come and attack us. Men, companions in arms, we will win. The victory is ours, and after the victory the fruits of our triumph. Let the generals go to their divisions and take up their positions."

At these words there was a confused movement all through the army. The men and officers had been carefully portioned among the generals, who now began collecting their little divisions together. It was a work not easily accomplished, yet presently somewhat of order was established, the different parties taking up their positions, while the general-in-chief went about inspecting and giving instructions.

I had fifty picked men and twenty officers. We took our position in front of the reserves, and in easy reach of the two secret roads, though, for my part, I intended to use the more difficult one on the left if I could, because from that side, once the gun was up the mountains, the points of vantage were very much better.

While I was giving my men instructions I was surprised to see little Vicente running toward me. "So ho," I said, "you have come to join the Army of Restoration?"

"Oh, no, I haven't. I'm a Conservative, and you know I am, but I have brought you something. See, it's a sacred heart made of red flannel. Eulalia sent it."

"She did?" I replied, in amazement.

"Yes, she did. She wanted to send a cross, but I told her a cross couldn't do you any good, so she sent you a sacred heart and a long message with it, big words that I can't remember, but what she meant was she likes you, but she doesn't like the way you come at her, and you have got to stop it. Now I am going to stay and take care of you and see the fight."

"You might be killed; I must send you back," I said.

"But I won't go. I won't be killed, either. See,

I've brought my crucifix which will protect me, and I'll stand with it in front of you; then the bullets can't hurt you."

"Vicente, you must go back," I said, sternly.

"But you'll surely be killed without me, the cross can't do you any good, and I don't want you to be killed."

"A mascot, a mascot!" my men were calling out, and Vicente stayed with us; the little chap usually got what he wanted. He now divided his time between me and my men, and soon became a prime favourite among them, though he abused us roundly and in no very careful language told us what he thought of our cause.

Just then a commotion was noticed along the road; the captured priests were being brought up, women following after them weeping and wailing. The soldiers forced the women back, and the priests were marched through the lines, amid curses and recriminations.

"My, but he's a wise general," was little Vicente's comment. "See, he's brought the priests, to make them go out and turn back the bullets."

It was a sight, a terribly pitiful sight. Surely the battle to come would be cruel, a battle of hatred, and we were all inflamed for it. But the priests, what a sight! all kinds and conditions were there. Some with licentious faces, like those who sat at the middle table at the school grown fat through rich living in their parish positions, were now trembling with fear and pleading for mercy, and at them the men jeered and cursed. Then there were the calm servants of God, some looking steadfastly before them, others

bending low and telling their beads. To these little comment was given; but from a group of those humble men in rough gowns of brown, lines of self-denial marked on their faces, men who went about doing good and asked for themselves not at all, some of our men craved a blessing, which was always immediately given.

The little group passed on up the road. The general commanding received them and said mockingly, as they were brought before him, "My friends, you pretend to serve God, and yet of you we hear licentious crimes and stories of scandal freely whispered. You claim to minister and give aid to the dying. Soon many will die. Show us and prove to us, then, if there is truth in your claims, that neither danger nor bodily pain would deter you from aiding the dying. Go out in front of the lines, and make your ministrations." At these words some of the priests began pleading for mercy; most of them trembled, turned pale, though they said nothing, but some remained calm and said they were ready.

In that instant an alarm ran through the army. A cheering, shouting, and cursing in front told us that the enemy were on their way to attack; a few shots were fired and then there was silence. The afternoon was well spent, the battle would not be to-day, and later we learned it was only a skirmish line which had crept up the mountains to test our position.

That afternoon I put a coronel in charge of my men, and went over the mountains, using the secret road, down the rough outer side of the ridge and on through the woods till I reached a place where I could see the enemy's forces. They had more men than we could

muster, more than twice as many, it appeared to me, and they were better drilled and equipped. They had one large and two small cannon, and were in high spirits, expecting an easy victory in the morning.

To get back and tell what I had seen was a difficult task. The mountainsides were rough and precipitous, but I who had been long in the woods found the way, and reported to the general-in-chief. The news was most important, and immediately a part of the reserves were called up from the valley and sent to the top of the ridge, to strengthen that position, and they were instructed to hold the pass as long as possible, drawing the whole attacking army into the fight. I was directed to take the small cannon into position at once, so that I could sweep the attacking party after they had forced the ridge, and were coming down toward the valley; but I was cautioned and ordered not to use it till our opponents were over the ridge, for the general wished them to be caught in his ambush and to have them between two fires. If they thought we had only rifles they would press their attack, but if they learned that we had a cannon where it could scarce be expected, they would attack with caution and in time overcome us with superior numbers.

Going back to my men, I gave a few orders, had the cannon hoisted up on my shoulders, and began the struggle to reach a favourable position. The way was hard, the gun crushed its weight on my back, still I struggled on, the men following after, wondering and giving such help as they could. Sometimes I sank on my knees against the steeper places, but always kept gaining a little and still a little more on the way up-

ward. At last I brought the gun to the chosen position, and placed it in hiding, where by moving it but a short distance I could command the road on either side of the pass. There my men made our camp and, exhausted, I went to sleep, leaving the coronels to take charge of the minor arrangements.

In the morning, when the glowing light of the sun came on the mountains, we heard the stern call to arms, — the battle was coming. From my position on the ridge I saw our enemies prepare their advance, and sent word to the general-in-chief that their whole force was about to attack. Little Vicente, awe and childish terror mingled on his face, saw the army approaching, and, trembling, begged me to hide in the woods with him, but growing somewhat accustomed to the sight, he forgot his fears, and was once again the light-hearted, thoughtless companion hailed as our mascot.

We could plainly see the enemy, but were a little below the crest of the ridge, so they could not see us. On they came, and reaching a turn in the road, brought their cannon into position, and began to shell the ridge and the crest of the divide; but their aim was not good, and while the shells made a terrible noise as they went through the air, no harm was done. After an hour or so of such fireworks, they evidently decided that the mountains were cleared, and their advance was sounded.

On they came, and I saw our men take up their positions, and I saw, too, the band of priests, jeered at by our men, forced to the front, pricked forward with knives and machettes. Some seemed to go without protest, while others were praying their captors to spare

them; some remained where they were, but others, evidently trying to escape to their friends, started to run forward. Their flight was too late; a volley from the attacking party was replied to by our men, and some of the priests fell as they ran. Two or three, a little more active, escaped to the woods, and were later found killed from falling down the steep sides of the mountains. On surged the enemy, crowding their advance forward only to be driven back by the shots from our men. The priests who had not tried to escape remained calm, and paying no heed to the bullets, went about giving their ministrations. They seemed to bear charmed lives, and of those who remained many were still actively engaged on errands of mercy.

The passions of our men were rising, blood had been seen, and fiercer and ever more deadly mounted the contest. The enemy continually pressed on their attacks, but to be hurled back again and again. The narrow pass where they advanced piled up with the dead, dying, and wounded. The priests were taken by the enemy for our men in disguise, and though through it all they continued their ministrations, there was no help for them. Among them were some cowards, the fat, licentious priests of the parish who grovelled in terror, some clinging to the side of the mountain, others in frenzy pleading and calling for mercy, but their friends still thought them our men disguised, and no mercy was given. One after another they were shot down, our own men, when necessary, saw to that; and a fierce desire seized my heart to put a ball into some of them myself, but from where we were still held in reserve this could not be, though I knew that later a

shot would be mine. From where I stood I could see two fat fellows quaking with fear, a little out of the way among the rocks at the side of the road and safe from our men. When the time came to bring my company into action I would send lead into their bellies and then see them roll down the mountain.

But the priests, the missionaries, and the brothers who were doing their duty almost received our tears of sympathy in our admiration. With courage, magnificent courage, service, calm, beautiful service, and then death, through all those first hours of the attack, they gave their ministrations and faltered not. At last, one only remained, a young man, in a brown gown, who entirely alone continued doing his duty. A great shout arose from the enemy; our men were weakening, and with cheers and shouts of defiance, on came the attack, nearer and nearer. Would the young priest fall ere they reached him? Would he be saved? My thoughts were all on him; he deserved to live, — yes, they had reached him. He had passed through the ordeal, and I was rejoicing.

Now came the clash of the charge. Our men withstood for a time and then were forced back, and the whole attacking army, yes, all of them, with their cannon, were over the ridge. The time for my action had come, and while my men were rolling the cannon into position, I turned my attention to the two priests among the rocks, who were embracing each other, their fat, licentious faces beaming with satisfaction at their escape. How they would boast in the future of their bravery and devotion between the lines of battle! Dogs! What did I care for them! Two quick shots,

two terrified, despairing cries, and both priests went plunging headlong down the mountainside.

The cannon was ready, and well-directed shots cut down the rear of our enemies. My firing was the signal for our men to come up the secret roads, and before the enemy could understand what had happened, their force was surrounded. With a cheer our soldiers now swarmed down the road, and I, grasping the cannon, carried it forward where it could command all the road, and with delight had showers of shot sent down on the struggling mass. When our own men began to mingle with those of the enemy, I stopped firing, left the gun in charge of the senior coronel, naming him a general, and seizing a pistol and a machette, the real weapon with which our battles were finally decided, I sprang down the mountain, joined our men, and was soon in the thick of the fight.

With blood and destruction, curses and groanings, and cries of fierce passion, the masses swayed back and forth, the mountain pass reeked with their sweatings and blood. Hatred and frenzy gave nerve to the arm. We shrieked our defiance and poured out our curses. None thought to surrender, none thought to ask quarter. We fought and would fight to the end, though hell yawned before us. Here now my strength brought our triumph; deeds were done at my hand which but for the frenzied thirst after blood I could not have accomplished. With cryings and shoutings and shriekings from all about us, I led the fight, cutting, ever cutting our way into the ranks of the enemy, till with clothes saturated with the spoutings of blood, friend could scarcely be distinguished from foe. There was a giving way

and sliding, a wild shriek of defiance from the throats of our enemies, and the struggling mass was vomited out of the pass and came down to the valley. Here a few of our men, till now held in stern check by the commander-in-chief, broke in the fight, and, overpowered by these fresh men, the enemy surrendered, the victory was ours.

Silence fell over the country, and above us hundreds of vultures, black forms, circled over the field of carnage. Then groans and moanings were heard coming down from the pass, and a little red stream trickled out by the side of the road, increasing in volume till all the gully was for awhile filled with a thick stream of blood.

The men who could now gave their time to aiding those who might be saved, though really there were few. Scarce a man had fallen that had not been immediately despatched by his opponent; in a hand to hand fight, none spared the wounded, for even they might be dangerous if left behind in fighting.

The general-in-chief called for volunteers to go and take possession of our enemy's camp, where perhaps some fighting remained to be done. At the call I sprang forward, though wounded in many places, but not seriously, — mere cuts which would soon heal.

Up we went through the paths, some two hundred hardened men marching triumphantly, the paths slippery with blood, our way impeded with piles of bodies hacked and mutilated, friends and foes lying together where they had fallen, struggling in death.

On the mountain we met the young missionary in brown, a big ugly wound on his forehead, yet he was searching among the dead to find some still alive

to whom he might give aid or comfort. He stepped aside for us, giving no sign of reproof, but his eyes looked on us with sorrow.

"Padre," I said, as I passed by him, "I hate the Church because it has done me wrong, but you — I saw what you did, and I could lie down on the ground before you in worship."

"Son," he replied, "your sins are beyond words to express. Learn to repent, do penance for your evils of this day, and of the other days gone before, and if you then crave a blessing I will give it and help you make your peace with God." Then the priest went on with his search, and I noticed a little boy clinging to his gown and crying bitterly.

"Vicente!" I called.

"Oh, Don General, Don General, isn't it awful! Take me away! They killed each other, they just kept on killing and killing, and they're all bloody, and wherever I look there is a dead face staring at me. Don General, oh, Don General, take me away, take me home to Eulalia!" and he stretched an appealing hand to me, though he dared not loose his hold on the priest's robe. I took his hand, and with a glad cry he was in my arms, and hid his face on my shoulder, not noticing the blood that covered my clothing.

Steadily we marched on across the divide, went down to the enemy's camp, and found it deserted. Spoils we collected, more than we could carry, and leaving a guard, started back to join the main army, which was now sadly depleted. Again we went through the bloody pass, again we saw the young priest absorbed on his errand of mercy, but to us he gave no heed.

The march back to San Esteban began. All along the road people gathered to see us, men volunteering to join our cause and all applauding and cheering. The acclamations for me were more than thrice those for any of the others. I responded to all, and paid no notice to the suspicious expressions on the faces of some of the principal generals as they looked at me and then at one another. It did not enter my mind that had I so willed the men would have followed me, and had I asked them, would have turned against the other generals. I did not think of this, nor did I think especially that presently there would be spoils to divide and exalted positions to fill; that he whom the army would follow could dictate the terms; that if the man that should thus come into power were young, strong, self-reliant, and capable, too, he might maintain his position for years, and for ever check the ambitions of others. I heard one of the generals say, "He will learn quick enough what power is, then look out," but I did not realize he was speaking of me.

We arrived at the cuartel, where I changed my clothes, and taking Vicente, who had somewhat revived from his terrors, sought Don Ignacio's house.

CHAPTER XXXV

EULALIA

ON reaching my quarters my first care was to seek Eulalia, hoping that I might now approach her. Her face was not so cold, yet my reception was the same as before as she stood before me near the head of the stairs, and in a calm voice said, "Don General, there is but one way to approach an honourable woman. Through my proper guardians only can you make your advances."

"Señorita," I said, "let me thank you for the sacred heart and the message Vicente brought me."

She flushed, but not in displeasure, and bowing low I left the stairs and went down to my room. How could I reach her? How impossible it was to do as she required. I must wait and be patient.

When I lay down to rest I found my wounds were somewhat distressing, and though not dangerous, would force me to pass some days in quiet. With little Vicente to wait on me I would be comfortably served, and as he was fully persuaded that but for his valour in coming to protect me with the cross I would have been killed, there was prospect that many amusing statements would be made to enlighten the tedium of my convalescence while he waited on me. Truly it was a brave

act on his part, and our friendship was strong, for who does not love a bright face backed by a stout heart? He divided his time between me, Eulalia, and the cuartel, and everywhere he was equally welcome.

For nearly a week I had been resting in bed, when Vicente came cautiously into my room, his face pale with excitement, his eyes hot with indignation. Carefully the door was shut behind him as he came to me, and speaking very quickly, but low, said, "Don General, something terrible is happening. Get up, and put on your clothes while I tell you." I began to do as he suggested, and he continued, "They are making peace. The bishop and an awful man they call Doctor Zacate have come, and with them came others. They are all in the council-room together. I saw them, and the government party is going to pay the big general and Doctor Zacate a great lot of money, and then they are going to kill you."

"Kill me?" I said, starting up.

"Yes, that's it. The general says you are dangerous, the men like you too much; and the bishop says he won't help pay for peace unless you are delivered to the government officers. Come and see for yourself," and the little boy looked solemn and affectionately anxious.

"Vicente, are you sure of what you say?"

"Come, Don General, dress quick. Come and see for yourself," and, as I hurried on my clothes, he whispered, "Do you think they will really kill you?"

"Perhaps," I replied; "it seems they will do anything."

With hurried steps we came to the cuartel, nor spoke

a word on our way. As I entered, the men started to cheer, but I raised my hand, and they stopped. Vicente took me down to the stables, showed me a secret door where one might crawl out to the streets, and on one side of it a flight of dark steps leading up. These we mounted cautiously lest we should make a noise, and presently stood where we could look down over the cornice and into the council-room.

Yes, it was as Vicente had said. There was the bishop, there was Doctor Zacate, sneering and self-important, and there too was Don Ignacio, evidently impatient that he should be delayed in his desire to go at once to his house, and there were many others too. They had finished drawing up a paper and Doctor Zacate was preparing to read it, a long, traitorous document which I do not remember though I heard it read. The Seven, and our general-in-chief was one of them, sold out to the government for the sum of two hundred thousand dollars to be paid to each one. A second document, couched in florid words, was included in the first, granting some reforms, and making a show of peace on honourable terms, which was the part of the treaty they would publish. A second supplementary document, read in Doctor Zacate's clear, sharp voice, I well remember, and it smote on my ears, blighting all my hopes again, — "And to our sorrow, it being proven that our valiant companion-in-arms, Joaquín Buenevento, is a wilful murderer, we agree that his person shall be delivered to the proper authorities of the state to be dealt with as our laws require."

I held my breath in amazement. These were the men for whom I was fighting!

"There, bishop," Doctor Zacate said, "that must be enough. You lost a fat priest, not much loss I should judge from what I heard of him, and we lose a good fighter, but one likely to make us more trouble than his fighting is worth. Ha, ha, it's an even bargain, and the money you pay us out of the Indian's rubber forests is enough to keep peace for the rest of our lives. This has been a glorious war!"

My voice came to me, and as a bull bellows deep in its rage, I roared out, my words coming thick in my throat, "Liars, traitors, sons of the devil who curse your country, hell itself is not bad enough for such as you!" and tearing down a part of the cornice I pushed it toward them, hoping that some might be killed, but the space was confined, and I could not do more than push the cornice forward. It fell with a crash, destroying a table and bringing intelligence back to the bewildered upturned faces of the devils below me.

"Arrest that man. Arrest General Buenevento!" shouted the commander-in-chief, and the order was repeated from one to another in bewildered tones all through the cuartel. What was happening? Arrest the man who had won the great battle? What had he done? Where had he gone? During the excitement, Vicente and I made our way down the secret stairs through the hidden door in the stables and out to the street. While the soldiers were searching the cuartel, we made our way toward Don Ignacio's house, Vicente half-running to keep up with my violent strides.

Was I insane because of the rage which burned in my heart, or was it grief that made a numbness of calm in my thoughts, a blind striding on towards something,

some act of which now I took no thought. Treachery, everywhere treachery, Spanish American treachery. Was there one honourable man in that land? Yet how could there be honour where women were not held in honour, and unless they kept themselves prisoners, were but held for shame? Barriers such as Eulalia held always before her, — Eulalia! There was my thought, there was the act to which I was being driven. Now she must receive me, now she would see by my expression that I was in earnest. I would take her away from that accursed place, in the woods I would protect her and tell her all the truth, and were she not willing to have me, I would only protect her and find a man who would be worthy of her. Now I knew I loved her as a man can love only an honourable woman. I would take her with me and escape to the woods. Such were my thoughts, such were the fancies surging up in my brain as we came to Don Ignacio's house.

Through the heavy doors now standing wide open I passed with impetuous haste. Across the courtyard, my steps resounding on the hard red bricks, past a disused fountain and illy attended plants covered with dust and parched with the heat, I ran, and toward the stairway to her apartments, calling, "Eulalia, Eulalia, you must come with me now!"

"Señor General," I heard her voice saying, "you may not enter a woman's apartments."

I had nearly reached the head of the stairs and I saw her, calmly standing as I had seen her so often before, a pistol in her right hand, and a crucifix held to her breast in her left, a beautiful picture of purity, strength, and queenly attraction; with an appealing

look on her face which would have stayed the hand were not the mind of the intruder insane. I stretched out my arms toward her crying, "Eulalia, hear me a moment! A word, only a word!" and I made a spring forward, saw her raise her pistol, tremble, and hesitate. I would reach her in time, — I could explain all. God of the devils, I was too late! There was a sharp report, and a spouting of blood as she pressed the cross to her wound.

For an instant she raised the crucifix, her blood dripping from it, then she sank down on the floor, and remorse at my thoughtless act, remorse which would thereafter haunt me for ever, beat down on my spirit. The one most worthy to live had been killed, and at her side a little boy, stained with her blood, was prostrate and crying as if he would sob his heart out in his grief.

I heard a step on the stairs, a voice I had heard before was eagerly, anxiously calling for Eulalia. I turned, and there was Don Ignacio, home from the cuartel. I made one step toward him, my arm raised for a blow which would crush his skull, when I heard the trembling voice of Vicente pleading, "Oh, devil-man, devil-man, that is my father! Don't kill my father, too!" And the blow which I had first aimed for destruction glanced half on his neck. He fell, for none could withstand the force of my arm, and I sprang over his prostrate form as a desire, a wild, fiendish desire, mingled with terror, came over my being to get away from that horrible place, and leaving it, kill and destroy whoever might impede my progress. To the woods, the deep woods I would fly; there was the only place for an Indian.

At the door of the house I met police officers coming

to take me. With scorn I laughed at them, sent some crashing down to the floor by my blows, and breaking through their ranks took my flight for the woods, directing my course to the side of the valley where I knew a pass over the mountains would lead me in the direction of my own people.

An outcry was raised at my flight, shots were fired, and I heard the joyous whistling of bullets on their mission of death. Looking back I saw horsemen following. Can one take with the hand a fish from its native water? Can one catch a bird in the air, though it circle close in its passing, and could one expect to catch a fleeing Indian on his course through a country known to him? I eluded those who pursued me, bushes and gullies gave me protection, the long grass hid my body where I crouched, and crouching could still make my way onward. I came to the mountains, and entering the woods, left San Esteban and its beautiful valley behind me for ever.

All was calm in my heart except my grief and the gnawing remorse, remorse which like a flood drowned out the hate that had burned in my feelings. On, blindly on, I went, seeing only the last appealing look on Eulalia's face, and fancying ever before me a cross, bathed in blood spattering out like a flaming halo.

Night came, and on the bare ground I dropped down exhausted. The rains were threatening, and dark clouds piled high in the night. Thunderings made the whole forest tremble, the lightning seeming to form bloody crosses as it flashed about me, and then left all in darkness. The rain poured on me in torrents, but what did I care? Into the soft, sticky earth I dug my

fingers and waited and waited. The storm rolled away, a clear light, as of virtue, shone down from the stars in the dark vault of heaven, and seemed to repeat again Eulalia's last appealing expression.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE RETURN

With morning I began my struggling way through the unknown forests, going back to my people. While difficulties beset me, while I had something to struggle for and contend against, the bitter remorse and the sore disappointment were not so intense. But when after days of exposure I at last came out on a river which I knew would take me to our village, and had made me a raft, and began floating down the stream on its current, then my head bowed in sorrow, then my heart sank at my soul's remorse. The wild roots which till now had sustained my body became keenly offensive; I sat still and let the raft drift down the river as it would.

Three days passed, then familiar scenes began to appear, places I had known before, places which I had once loved; but no joy came to my heart, I was going back to my people disgraced. Then, ere I thought it, a group of houses appeared on a bluff at a turn in the river. With sickening intensity my pulse began to beat violently, sweat stood on my brow; and silently, steadily, the raft floated along down the river.

The village was not changed I thought, till when I drew nearer I saw there were more houses, and two great buildings showing by their stained sides and

appearance that there rubber was stored, — José's rubber. I knew what it meant: a great company was there enjoying and taking what we had found. My raft swung around near the landing, A push with the pole I was carrying, and I was at home; and hope sprang up in my heart.

Some Indians came to the bluff above the landing, and I looked at them, called them by name, and then said, "Don't you remember me? I am Joaquín, José's foster son."

"Joaquín the liar! It's evil fortune that brings you here among us."

"You who swore an oath, and betrayed it! Out from us, a curse on your head!"

"See the power that now grinds us down!"

These and like expressions, curses, and names, too vile to repeat, were my welcome.

I shouted and cursed and commanded, but they would not listen. The noise of contention drew all the people together, and now sounds of derisive baying and howling filled the air, mingled with cries of liar, traitor, and half-breed. I saw José coming, and stretched out my arms to him, but he bayed at me and threw filth in my face. My woman, carrying a baby boy, came; I knew whose it was, and for her the people fell back. She mocked me and heaped curses on me, and at her bidding the little boy made faces, stuck out his tongue, and with his tiny hands threw filth at me.

My own son had defiled me, and seeing the act the people set up again their torment of derisive groanings and bayings, till I, maddened at their uncouth revilings, sprang to attack them all, to kill, and be

killed, and end everything there. But my strength was not what it had been. Exposure, with only wild roots to eat, had sapped it, and though some went down at my blows, I was soon overcome, carried back to the river, and set on my raft. A jar of food was brought, a bow and a bunch of arrows were given me, and my raft was pushed out in the stream. I began floating down the river, my people, my former friends, cursing both me and my departure.

Farther and farther I floated away, seeming as if my heartstrings would break as the distance grew, which must for ever be a gulf between me and the one spot where I might have atoned for a part of the wrong which had come from my life. I was floating away, my head bowed low on my breast, dry sobbings and sighings wracking my body. I was an outcast.

Down the river I floated despairing, and after days of travel reached the sea, and got out of the country before the alarm for my capture had reached the far distant coast. From place to place, from country to country I went, working my way with some peddler folk. Finally I settled down in a neighbouring republic, and there began a life of dissipation and excesses all unrestrained. Sometimes I made a little headway toward regaining once more a position in life, but I was a marked man; always the Church found me out, the giant who had murdered a priest, and I was again forced to start on my wanderings.

Here in these deep swamps and jungles I have found, with other outcasts, a place to rest. We are waiting till a revolution, wherever it may be, so long as we can reach its army, starts up against the Church party.

Whether the object be gain for the leaders or whether it is a real effort to overthrow a power we hate, we will flock to the standard.

From the streets in the cities, from the plantations in all parts of the country, even from the distant places, the outcasts and the abandoned children of parents unknown, sons of dishonour, will gather to fight and to kill because of their hatred. They who lead revolutions can count on these people. What else could there be in a land where so many women are not held in honour; and where, though good women are many, too frequently men live in evil with no thoughts of making a home where an honourable man and an honourable woman rear their own children?

From this, and because of this, come our revolutions. Many times I have fought in them. I am an outcast, and will continue on fighting till I die.

Towards the last of the season in which Joaquín was my guide, I, with my party, was held up for a long time in the jungles by the unusual dryness of the weather, the river being too low for us to proceed on our way to the coast. At last the rain came, and in a short time the stream was high enough so we might continue our journey, but Joaquín could not go with us, he was down with the fever. In spite of his urging us to go on now that we could, saying that he could manage by himself, we tarried, loath to leave him who had served us so well. He was suffering from a cruel swamp fever more blighting and dangerous than yellow fever, but not contagious. It might quickly prove fatal, or if he recovered would probably leave his body a wreck, and

already his gaunt form and wasted muscles hardly showed what his strength had once been.

While we lingered, giving such aid as we could, a canoe came down the river, and a grave priest with a kindly, calm face stood among us. He wore a coarse brown robe, and we recognized him as one of those who wander about, denying themselves, and seeking the outcasts. His face in its calmness would have been strikingly handsome, except that across his brow was a heavy scar.

Joaquín's fever was mounting higher, delirium took him, and he began to cry out and to curse. The priest stood looking at him, and then said to us, "I have seen this man before in an hour of trial; he is under the ban, his crimes are as dark as the black cloud of vapour which hangs over hell. Once I gave him my word that God permitting, and he wished it, I would help him make his peace with high Heaven. I will stay with him. Continue your journey, señores, your guide will have careful attention."

Sorrowful at the parting with our companion, we reluctantly made ourselves ready to take advantage of the full current, and finally launched our rafts and canoes. In the doorway of the hut where the sick man was lying, we saw the priest, his kindly, clear eyes resting on us. We heard Joaquín's cries as he called on Eulalia to wait a moment, only a moment, he had something to tell her, and again he was begging José to hear him, only one word; and then we heard him in the distance, as the torrent of muddy water bore our canoe on its way, blaspheming and cursing, words such as would make the soul chill and tremble.

Whether he recovered, or, dying, made his peace with God in the last moments, we never surely knew, but there is a priest in Spanish America, bowed from exposure, who could tell all about it. He wears a coarse brown robe, and seeks mostly the cities, where he ministers to the people who are in the streets and to the outcasts.

With him oftentimes, it is said, there is a man old from sorrows, his body contorted and bowed, his face showing deep lines of suffering, but every one loves him, especially the children; and he often gathers them about him, talking to them of virtue and honour. In the cell of this *penitente*, they say, there is a table, a hard board to sleep on, a chair, an altar, and a crucifix. The crucifix is stained with blood, sharp nails are driven through at the points, and these, it is said, he sometimes in the dead of night presses into the flesh till his blood covers the cross. People whisper that he has had a terrible past, but once he knew a saintly woman, and now in remembrance of her tries to be worthy.









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